

The  
AUTOBIOGRAPHY  
OF A THIEF



University of  
Southern  
Library

ROBINSON HAPGOOD



THE LIBRARY  
OF  
THE UNIVERSITY  
OF CALIFORNIA  
LOS ANGELES





Digitized by the Internet Archive  
in 2007 with funding from  
Microsoft Corporation







*The* Autobiography *of* a Thief.



# *The Autobiography of* **a Thief**

*Recorded by*

HUTCHINS HAPGOOD

*Author of "The Spirit of the Ghetto," etc.*



NEW YORK

FOX, DUFFIELD & COMPANY

1903

Copyright, 1903, By  
FOX, DUFFIELD & COMPANY

---

*Entered at the Library of Congress, Washington, U. S. A.*

---

*Entered at Stationers' Hall, London, England.*

---

*Published May, 1903.*



HV  
6653  
Z9 H2

*" Oh, happy he who can still hope to emerge from this sea of error ! "*

FAUST.

*" There is no man doth a wrong for the wrong's sake, but thereby to purchase himself profit, or pleasure, or honour, or the like ; therefore why should I be angry with a man for loving himself better than me ? And if any man should do wrong merely out of ill-nature, why, yet it is but like the thorn or briar, which prick and scratch because they can do no other. "*

BACON.

[ 5 ]

1344269

Rep. 215925



# CONTENTS.

CHAPTER	PAGE
EDITOR'S NOTE. . . . .	9
I. BOYHOOD AND EARLY CRIME . . . . .	15
II. MY FIRST FALL . . . . .	34
III. MIXED ALE LIFE IN THE FOURTH AND SEVENTH WARDS . . . . .	50
IV. WHEN THE GRAFT WAS GOOD . . . . .	73
V. MAMIE AND THE NEGOTIABLE BONDS . . . . .	89
VI. WHAT THE BURGLAR FACES . . . . .	107
VII. IN STIR . . . . .	132
VIII. IN STIR (CONTINUED) . . . . .	154
IX. IN STIR AND OUT . . . . .	182
X. AT THE GRAFT AGAIN . . . . .	202
XI. BACK TO PRISON . . . . .	228
XII. ON THE OUTSIDE AGAIN . . . . .	255
XIII. IN THE MAD-HOUSE . . . . .	300
XIV. OUT OF HELL . . . . .	332
EDITOR'S POSTSCRIPT . . . . .	348



## Editor's Note.

---

I MET the ex-pickpocket and burglar whose autobiography follows soon after his release from a third term in the penitentiary. For several weeks I was not particularly interested in him. He was full of a desire to publish in the newspapers an exposé of conditions obtaining in two of our state institutions, his motive seeming partly revenge and partly a very genuine feeling that he had come in contact with a systematic crime against humanity. But as I continued to see more of him, and learned much about his life, my interest grew ; for I soon perceived that he not only had led a typical thief's life, but was also a man of more than common natural intelligence, with a gift of vigorous expression. With little schooling he had yet educated himself, mainly by means of the prison libraries, until he had a good and

individually expressed acquaintance with many of the English classics, and with some of the masterpieces of philosophy.

That this ex-convict, when a boy on the East Side of New York City, should have taken to the "graft" seemed to me, as he talked about it, the most natural thing in the world. His parents were honest, but ignorant and poor. One of his brothers, a normal and honorable man, is a truck driver with a large family; and his relatives and honest friends in general belong to the most modest class of working people. The swell among them is another brother, who is a policeman; but Jim, the ex-convict, is by far the cleverest and most intelligent of the lot. I have often seen him and his family together, on Saturday nights, when the clan gathers in the truckman's house for a good time, and he is the life of the occasion, and admired by the others. Jim was an unusually energetic and ambitious boy, but the respectable people he knew did not appeal to his imagination. As he played on the



*Editor's Note.*

street, other boys pointed out to him the swell thief at the corner saloon, and told him tales of big robberies and exciting adventures, and the prizes of life seemed to him to lie along the path of crime. There was no one to teach him what constitutes real success, and he went in for crime with energy and enthusiasm.

It was only after he had become a professional thief and had done time in the prisons that he began to see that crime does not pay. He saw that all his friends came to ruin, that his own health was shattered, and that he stood on the verge of the mad-house. His self-education in prison helped him, too, to the perception that he had made a terrible mistake. He came to have intellectual ambitions and no longer took an interest in his old companions. After several weeks of constant association with him I became morally certain that his reform was as genuine as possible under the circumstances; and that, with fair success in the way of getting something to do, he would remain honest.

*Editor's Note.*

I therefore proposed to him to write an autobiography. He took up the idea with eagerness, and through the entire period of our work together, has shown an unwavering interest in the book and very decided acumen and common sense. The method employed in composing the volume was that, practically, of the interview. From the middle of March to the first of July we met nearly every afternoon, and many evenings, at a little German café on the East Side. There, I took voluminous notes, often asking questions, but taking down as literally as possible his story in his own words; to such a degree is this true, that the following narrative is an authentic account of his life, with occasional descriptions and character-sketches of his friends of the Under World. Even without my explicit assurance, the autobiography bears sufficient internal evidence of the fact that, essentially, it is a thief's own story. Many hours of the day time, when I was busy with other things, my friend—for I have come to look upon him

*Editor's Note.*

as such—was occupied with putting down on paper character-sketches of his pals and their careers, or recording his impressions of the life they had followed. After I had left town for the summer, in order to prepare this volume, I wrote to Jim repeatedly, asking for more material on certain points. This he always furnished in a manner which showed his continued interest, and a literary sense, though fragmentary, of no common kind.

H. H.



# *The Autobiography of a Thief.*

---

## CHAPTER I.

### *Boyhood and Early Crime.*

I HAVE been a professional thief for more than twenty years. Half of that time I have spent in state's prison, and the other half in "grafting" in one form or another. I was a good pickpocket and a fairly successful burglar; and I have known many of the best crooks in the country. I have left the business for good, and my reasons will appear in the course of this narrative. I shall tell my story with entire frankness. I shall not try to defend myself. I shall try merely to tell the truth. Perhaps in so doing I shall explain myself.

I was born on the east side of New York City in 1868, of poor but honest parents. My father was an Englishman who had married an Irish girl and emigrated to America, where he had a large family, no one of whom, with the

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

exception of myself, went wrong. For many years he was an employee of Brown Brothers and Company and was a sober, industrious man, and a good husband and kind father. To me, who was his favorite, he was perhaps too kind. I was certainly a spoiled child. I remember that when I was five years old he bought me a twenty-five dollar suit of clothes. I was a vigorous, handsome boy, with red, rosy cheeks and was not only the pet of my family, but the life of the neighborhood as well.

At that time, which is as far back as I can remember, we were living on Munro Street, in the Seventh Ward. This was then a good residential neighborhood, and we were comfortable in our small, wooden house. The people about us were Irish and German, the large Jewish emigration not having begun yet. Consequently, lower New York did not have such a strong business look as it has now, but was cleanly and respectable. The gin-mills were fewer in number, and were comparatively decent. When the Jews came they started many basement saloons, or cafés, and for the first time, I believe, the social evil began to be connected with the drinking places.



## *Boyhood and Early Crime.*

I committed my first theft at the age of six. Older heads put me up to steal money from the till of my brother's grocery store. It happened this way. There were several much older boys in the neighborhood who wanted money for row-boating and theatres. One was eighteen years old, a ship-caulker ; and another was a roustabout of seventeen. I used to watch these boys practice singing and dancing in the big marble lots in the vicinity. How they fired my youthful imagination ! They told me about the theatres then in vogue—Tony Pastor's, the old Globe, Wood's Museum and Josh Hart's Theatre Comique, afterwards owned by Harrigan and Hart.

One day, George, the roustabout, said to me : “ Kid, do you want to go row-boating with us ? ” When I eagerly consented he said it was too bad, but the boat cost fifty cents and he only had a ten-cent stamp (a small paper bill : in those days there was very little silver in circulation). I did not bite at once, I was so young, and they treated me to one of those wooden balls fastened to a rubber string that you throw out and catch on the rebound. I was tickled to death. I shall never forget that day as long as I live. It was a Saturday, and all

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

day long those boys couldn't do too much for me.

Towards evening they explained to me how to rob my brother's till. They arranged to be outside the store at a certain hour, and wait until I found an opportunity to pass the money to them. My mother watched in the store that evening, but when she turned her back I opened the till and gave the eight or ten dollars it contained to the waiting boys. We all went row-boating and had a jolly time. But they were not satisfied with that. What I had done once, I could do again, and they held out the theatre to me, and pretended to teach me how to dance the clog. Week in and week out I furnished them with money, and in recompense they would sometimes take me to a *matinée*. What a joy! How I grew to love the vaudeville artists with their songs and dances, and the wild Bowery melodramas! It was a great day for Indian plays, and the number of Indians I have scalped in imagination, after one of these shows, is legion.

Some of the small boys, however, who did not share in the booty grew jealous and told my father what was doing. The result was that a certain part of my body was sore for weeks

## *Boyhood and Early Crime.*

afterwards. My feelings were hurt, too, for I did not know at that time that I was doing anything very bad. My father, indeed, accompanied the beating with a sermon, telling me that I had not only broken God's law but had robbed those that loved me. One of my brothers, who is now a policeman in the city service, told me that I had taken my ticket for the gallows. The brother I had robbed, who afterwards became a truckman, patted me on the head and told me not to do it again. He was always a good fellow. And yet they all seemed to like to have me play about the streets with the other little boys, perhaps because the family was large, and there was not much room in the house.

So I had to give up the till; but I hated to, for even at that age I had begun to think that the world owed me a living! To get revenge I used to hide in a charcoal shed and throw pebbles at my father as he passed. I was indeed the typical bad boy, and the apple of my mother's eye.

When I couldn't steal from the till any more, I used to take clothes from my relatives and sell them for theatre money; or any other object I thought I could make away with. I

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

did not steal merely for theatre money but partly for excitement too. I liked to run the risk of being discovered. So I was up to any scheme the older boys proposed. Perhaps if I had been raised in the wild West I should have made a good trapper or cow-boy, instead of a thief. Or perhaps even birds' nests and fish would have satisfied me, if they had been accessible.

One of my biggest exploits as a small boy was made when I was eight years old. Tom's mother had a friend visiting her, whom Tom and I thought we would rob. Tom, who was a big boy, and some of his friends, put me through a hall bed-room window, and I made away with a box of valuable jewelry. But it did me no good for the big boys sold it to a woman who kept a second-hand store on Division Street, and I received no part of the proceeds.

My greatest youthful disappointment came about four weeks later. A boy put me up to steal a box out of a wagon. I boldly made away with it and ran into a hall-way, where he was waiting. The two of us then went into his back-yard, opened the box and found a beautiful sword, the handle studded with little

*Boyhood and Early Crime.*

stones. But the other boy had promised me money, and here was only a sword ! I cried for theatre money, and then the other boy boxed my ears. He went to his father, who was a free mason, and got a fifty cent "stamp." He gave me two three-cent pieces and kept the rest. I shall never forget that injustice as long as I live. I remember it as plainly as if it happened yesterday. We put the sword under a mill in Cherry Street and it disappeared a few hours later. I thought the boy and his father had stolen it, and told them so. I got another beating, but I believe my suspicion was correct, for the free mason used to give me a ten cent stamp whenever he saw me—to square me, I suppose.

When it came to contests with boys of my own size I was not so meek, however. One day I was playing in Jersey, in the back-yard of a boy friend's house. He displayed his pen-knife, and it took my fancy. I wanted to play with it, and asked him to lend it to me. He refused, and I grabbed his hand. He plunged the knife into my leg. I didn't like that, and told him so, not in words, but in action. I remember that I took his ear nearly off with a hatchet. I was then eight years old.

## *The Autobiography of a Thief.*

About this time I began to go to Sunday School, with what effect on my character remains to be seen. One day I heard a noted priest preach. I had one dollar and eighty cents in my pocket which I had stolen from my brother. I thought that each coin in my pocket was turning red-hot because of my anxiety to spend it. While the good man was talking of the Blessed One I was inwardly praying for him to shut up. He had two beautiful pictures which he intended to give to the best listener among the boys. When he had finished his talk he called me to him, gave me the pictures and said: "It's such boys as you who, when they grow up, are a pride to our Holy Church."

A year later I went to the parochial school, but did not stay long, for they would not have me. I was a sceptic at seven and an agnostic at eight, and I objected to the prayers every five minutes. I had no respect for ceremonies. They did not impress my imagination in the slightest, partly because I learned at an early age to see the hypocrisy of many good people. One day half a dozen persons were killed in an explosion. One of them I had known. Neighbors said of him: "What



## *Boyhood and Early Crime.*

a good man has gone," and the priest and my mother said he was in heaven. But he was the same man who had often told me not to take money from the money-drawer, for that was dangerous, but to search my father's pockets when he was asleep. For this advice I had given the rascal many a dollar. Ever after that I was suspicious of those who were over-virtuous. I told my mother I did not believe her and the priest, and she slapped my face and told me to mind my catechism.

Everything mischievous that happened at the parochial school was laid to my account, perhaps not entirely unjustly. If a large fire-cracker exploded, it was James—that was my name. If some one sat on a bent pin, the blame was due to James. If the class tittered teacher Nolan would rush at me with a hickory stick and yell: "It's you, you devil's imp!" and then he'd put the question he had asked a hundred times before: "Who med (made) you?"

I was finally sent away from the parochial school because I insulted one of the teachers, a Catholic brother. I persisted in disturbing him whenever he studied his catechism, which I believed he already knew by heart. This

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

brother's favorite, by the way, was a boy who used to say his prayers louder than anybody else. I met him fifteen years afterwards in state's prison. He had been settled for "vogel-grafting," that is, taking little girls into hall-ways and robbing them of their gold earrings. He turned out pretty well, however, in one sense, for he became one of the best shoe-makers in Sing Sing.

Although, as one can see from the above incidents, I was not given to veneration, yet in some ways I was easily impressed. I always loved old buildings, for instance. I was baptized in the building which was until lately the Germania Theatre, and which was then a church; and that old structure always had a strange fascination for me. I used to hang about old churches and theatres, and preferred on such occasions to be alone. Sometimes I sang and danced, all by myself, in an old music hall, and used to pore over the names marked in lead pencil on the walls. Many is the time I have stood at night before some old building which has since been razed to the ground, and even now I like to go round to their sites. I like almost anything that is old, even old men and women. I never loved

my mother much until she was an old woman. All stories of the past interested me; and later, when I was in prison, I was specially fond of history.

After I was dismissed from the parochial school, I entered the public school, where I stayed somewhat longer. There I studied reading, writing, arithmetic and later, grammar, and became acquainted with a few specimens of literature. I remember Longfellow's *Excelsior* was a favorite of mine. I was a bright, intelligent boy, and, if it had not been for conduct, in which my mark was low, I should always have had the gold medal, in a class of seventy. I used to play truant constantly, and often went home and told my mother that I knew more than the teacher. She believed me, for certainly I was the most intelligent member of my family.

Yes, I was more intelligent than my parents or any of my brothers and sisters. Much good it has done me! Now that I have "squared it" I see a good deal of my family, and they are all happy in comparison with me. On Saturday nights I often go around to see my brother the truckman. He has come home tired from his week's work, but happy with his

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

twelve dollar salary and the prospect of a holiday with his wife and children. They sit about in their humble home on Saturday night, with their pint of beer, their songs and their jovial stories. Whenever I am there, I am, in a way, the life of the party. My repartee is quicker than that of the others. I sing gayer songs and am jollier with the working girls who visit my brother's free home. But when I look at my stupid brother's quiet face and calm and strong bearing, and then realize my own shattered health and nerves and profound discontent, I know that my slow brother has been wiser than I. It has taken me many years on the rocky path to realize this truth. For by nature I am an Ishmælite, that is, a man of impulse, and it is only lately that wisdom has been knocked into me.

Certainly I did not realize my fate when I was a kid of ten, filled with contempt for my virtuous and obscure family! I was overflowing with spirits and arrogance, and began to play "hooky" so often that I practically quit school about this time.

It was then, too, that we moved again, this time to Cherry Street, to the wreck of my life. At the end of the block on which we lived was

## *Boyhood and Early Crime.*

a corner saloon, the headquarters of a band of professional thieves. They were known as the Old Border Gang, and among them were several very well-known and successful crooks. They used to pass our way regularly, and boys older than I (my boy companions always had the advantage of me in years) used to point the famous "guns" out to me. When I saw one of these great men pass, my young imagination was fired with the ambition to be as he was! With what eagerness we used to talk about "Juggy," and the daring robbery he committed in Brooklyn! How we went over again and again in conversation, the trick by which Johnny the "grafter" had fooled the detective in the matter of the bonds!

We would tell stories like these by the hour, and then go round to the corner, to try to get a look at some of the celebrities in the saloon. A splendid sight one of these swell grafters was, as he stood before the bar or smoked his cigar on the corner! Well dressed, with clean linen collar and shirt, a diamond in his tie, an air of ease and leisure all about him, what a contrast he formed to the respectable hod-carrier or truckman or mechanic, with soiled clothes and no collar! And what a contrast

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

was his dangerous life to that of the virtuous laborer !

The result was that I grew to think the career of the grafter was the only one worth trying for. The real prizes of the world I knew nothing about. All that I saw of any interest to me was crooked, and so I began to pilfer right and left : there was nothing else for me to do. Besides I loved to treat those older than myself. The theatre was a growing passion with me and I began to be very much interested in the baseball games. I used to go to the Union grounds in Brooklyn, where after the third inning, I could usually get admitted for fifteen cents, to see the old Athletics or Mutuals play. I needed money for these amusements, for myself and other boys, and I knew of practically only one way to get it.

If we could not get the money at home, either by begging or stealing, we would tap tills, if possible, in the store of some relative ; or tear brass off the steps in the halls of flats and sell it at junk shops. A little later, we used to go to Grand Street and steal shoes and women's dresses from the racks in the open stores, and pawn them. In the old Seventh Ward there used to be a good many

## *Boyhood and Early Crime.*

silver plates on the doors of private houses. These we would take off with chisels and sell to metal dealers. We had great fun with a Dutchman who kept a grocery store on Cherry Street. We used to steal his strawberries, and did not care whether he saw us or not. If he grabbed one of us, the rest of the gang would pelt him with stones until he let go, and then all run around the corner before the "copper" came into sight.

All this time I grew steadily bolder and more desperate, and the day soon came when I took consequences very little into consideration. My father and mother sometimes learned of some exploit of mine, and a beating would be the result. I still got the blame for everything, as in school, and was sometimes punished unjustly. I was very sensitive and this would rankle in my soul for weeks, so that I stole harder than ever. And yet I think that there was some good in me. I was never cruel to any animals, except cats; for cats, I used to tie their tails together, and throw them over a clothesline to dry. I liked dogs, horses, children and women, and have always been gentle to them. What I really was was a healthy young animal, with a vivid imagina-

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

tion and a strong body. I learned early to swim and fight and play base-ball. Dime and nickel novels always seemed very tame to me ; I found it much more exciting to hear true stories about the grafters at the corner saloon ! —big men, with whom as yet I did not dare to speak ; I could only stare at them with awe.

I shall never forget the first time I ever saw a pickpocket at work. It was when I was about thirteen years old. A boy of my own age, Zack, a great pal of mine, was with me. Zack and I understood one another thoroughly and well knew how to get theatre money by petty pilfering, but of real graft we were as yet ignorant, although we had heard many stories about the operations of actual, professional thieves. We used to steal rides in the cars which ran to and from the Grand Street ferries ; and run off with overcoats and satchels when we had a chance. One day we were standing on the rear platform when a woman boarded the car, and immediately behind her a gentlemanly looking man with a high hat. He was well-dressed and looked about thirty-five years old. As the lady entered the car, the man, who stayed outside on the platform,



## *Boyhood and Early Crime.*

pulled his hand away from her side and with it came something from her pocket—a silk handkerchief. I was on the point of asking the woman if she had dropped something, when Zack said to me, “Mind your own business.” The man, who had taken the pocket-book along with the silk handkerchief, seeing that we were “next,” gave us the handkerchief and four dollars in ten and fifteen cent paper money (“stamps”).

Zack and I put our heads together. We were “wiser” than we had been half an hour before. We had learned our first practical lesson in the world of graft. We had seen a pickpocket at work, and there seemed to us no reason why we should not try the game ourselves. Accordingly a day or two afterwards we arranged to pick our first pocket. We had, indeed, often taken money from the pockets of our relatives, but that was when the trousers hung in the closet or over a chair, and the owner was absent. This was the first time we had hunted in the open, so to speak ; the first time our prey was really alive.

It was an exciting occasion. Zack and I, who were “wise,” (that is, up to snuff) got several other boys to help us, though we did

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

not tell them what was doing, for they "were not buried" yet, that is, "dead," or ignorant. We induced five or six of them to jump on and off the rear platform of a car, making as much noise and confusion as possible, so as to distract the attention of any "sucker" that might board. Soon I saw a woman about to get on the car. My heart beat with excitement, and I signalled to Zack that I would make the "touch." In those days women wore big sacques with pockets in the back, open, so that one could look in and see what was there. I took the silk handkerchief on the run, and with Zack following, went up a side street and gloried under a lamp-post. In the corner of the handkerchief, tied up, were five two-dollar bills, and for weeks I was J. P. Morgan.

For a long time Zack and I felt we were the biggest boys on the block. We boasted about our great "touch" to the older boys of eighteen or nineteen years of age who had pointed out to us the grafters at the corner saloon. They were not "in it" now. They even condescended to be treated to a drink by us. We spent the money recklessly, for we knew where we could get more. In this

*Boyhood and Early Crime.*

state of mind, soon after that, I met the "pick" whom we had seen at work. He had heard of our achievement and kindly "staked" us, and gave us a few private lessons in picking pockets. He saw that we were promising youngsters, and for the sake of the profession gave us a little of his valuable time. We were proud enough, to be taken notice of by this great man. We felt that we were rising in the world of graft, and began to wear collars and neckties.

## CHAPTER II.

### *My First Fall.*

FOR the next two years, until I was fifteen, I made a great deal of money at picking pockets, without getting into difficulties with the police. We operated, at that time, entirely upon women, and were consequently known technically as Moll-buzzers—or “flies” that “buzz” about women.

In those days, and for several years later, Moll-buzzing, as well as picking pockets in general, was an easy and lucrative graft. Women's dresses seemed to be arranged for our especial benefit ; the back pocket, with its purse and silk handkerchief could be picked even by the rawest thief. It was in the days when every woman had to possess a fine silk handkerchief ; even the Bowery “cruisers” (street-walkers) carried them ; and to those women we boys used to sell the handkerchiefs we had stolen, receiving as much as a dollar, or even two dollars, in exchange.

It was a time, too, before the great depart-

## *My First Fall.*

ment stores and delivery wagon systems, and shoppers were compelled to carry more money with them than they do now, and to take their purchases home themselves through the streets. Very often before they reached their destination they had unconsciously delivered some of the goods to us. At that time, too, the wearing of valuable pins and stones, both by men and women, was more general than it is now. Furthermore, the "graft" was younger. There were not so many in the business, and the system of police protection was not so good. Altogether those were halcyon days for us.

The fact that we were very young helped us particularly in this business, for a boy can get next to a woman in a car or on the street more easily than a man can. He is not so apt to arouse her suspicions; and if he is a handsome, innocent-looking boy, and clever, he can go far in this line of graft. He usually begins this business when he is about thirteen, and by the age of seventeen generally graduates into something higher. Living off women, in any form, does not appeal very long to the imagination of the genuine grafter. Yet I know thieves who continue to be Moll-buzzers all

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

their lives ; and who are low enough to make their living entirely off poor working girls. The self-respecting grafter detests this kind ; and, indeed, these buzzers never see prosperous days after their boyhood. The business grows more difficult as the thief grows older. He cannot approach his prey so readily, and grows shabbier with declining returns ; and shabbiness makes it difficult for him to mix up in crowds where this kind of work is generally done.

For several years we youngsters made a great deal of money at this line. We made a "touch" almost every day, and I suppose our "mob," composed of four or five lads who worked together, averaged three or four hundred dollars a week. We worked mainly on street cars at the Ferry, and the amount of "technique" required for robbing women was very slight. Two or three of us generally went together. One acted as the "dip," or "pick," and the other two as "stalls." The duty of the "stalls" was to distract the attention of the "sucker" or victim, or otherwise to hide the operations of the "dip". One stall would get directly in front of the woman to be robbed, the other directly behind her. If

## *My First Fall.*

she were in such a position in the crowd as to render it hard for the "dip," or "wire" to make a "touch," one of the stalls might bump against her, and beg her pardon, while the dip made away with her "leather," or pocket-book.

Shortly before I was fifteen years old I was "let in" to another kind of graft. One day Tim, Zack and I were boasting of our earnings to an older boy, twenty years of age, whose name was Pete. He grinned, and said he knew something better than Moll-buzzing. Then he told us about "shoving the queer" and got us next to a public truckman who supplied counterfeit bills. Our method was to carry only one bad bill among several good ones, so that if we were collared we could maintain our innocence. We worked this as a "side-graft," for some time. Pete and I used to go to mass on Sunday morning, and put a bad five dollar bill in the collector's box, taking out four dollars and ninety cents in change, in good money. We irreverently called this proceeding "robbing the dago in Rome." We use to pick "leathers," at the same time, from the women in the congregation. In those days I was very liberal in my religious views. I was not narrow, or bigoted. I attended Grace Church, in Tenth Street,

## *The Autobiography of a Thief.*

regularly and was always well repaid. But after a while this lucrative graft came to an end, for the collector began to get "next". One day he said to me, "Why don't you get your change outside? This is the fourth time you have given me a big bill." So we got "leary" (suspicious) and quit.

With my big rosy cheeks and bright eyes and complexion I suppose I looked, in those days, very holy and innocent, and used to work this graft for all it was worth. I remember how, in church, I used tracts or the Christian Advocate as "stalls"; I would hand them to a lady as she entered the church, and, while doing so, pick her pocket.

Even at the early age of fifteen I began to understand that it was necessary to save money. If a thief wants to keep out of the "pen" or "stir," (penitentiary) capital is a necessity. The capital of a grafter is called "spring-money," for he may have to use it at any time in paying the lawyer who gets him off in case of an arrest, or in bribing the policeman or some other official. To "spring," is to escape from the clutches of the law. If a thief has not enough money to hire a "mouth-piece" (criminal lawyer) he is in a



## *My First Fall.*

bad way. He is greatly handicapped, and can not "jump out" (steal) with any boldness.

But I always had great difficulty in saving "fall-money," (the same as spring-money; that is money to be used in case of a "fall," or arrest.) My temperament was at fault. When I had a few hundred dollars saved up I began to be troubled, not from a guilty conscience, but because I could not stand prosperity. The money burned a hole in my pocket. I was fond of all sorts of amusements, of "treating," and of clothes. Indeed, I was very much of a dude; and this for two reasons. In the first place I was naturally vain, and liked to make a good appearance. A still more substantial reason was that a good personal appearance is part of the capital of a grafter, particularly of a pickpocket. The world thinks that a thief is a dirty, disreputable looking object, next door to a tramp in appearance. But this idea is far from being true. Every grafter of any standing in the profession is very careful about his clothes. He is always neat, clean, and as fashionable as his income will permit. Otherwise he would not be permitted to attend large political gatherings, to sit on the platform, for instance,

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

and would be handicapped generally in his crooked dealings with mankind. No advice to young men is more common in respectable society than to dress well. If you look prosperous the world will treat you with consideration. This applies with even greater force to the thief. Keep up a "front" is the universal law of success, applicable to all grades of society. The first thing a grafter is apt to say to a pal whom he has not seen for a long time is, "You are looking good," meaning that his friend is well-dressed. It is sure flattery, and if a grafter wants to make a borrow he is practically certain of opening the negotiations with the stereotyped phrase: "You are looking good;" for the only time you can get anything off a grafter is when you can make him think you are prosperous.

But the great reason why I never saved much "fall-money" was not "booze," or theatres, or clothes. "Look for the woman" is a phrase, I believe, in good society; and it certainly explains a great deal of a thief's misfortunes. Long before I did anything in Graftdom but petty pilfering, I had begun to go with the little girls in the neighborhood. At that time they had no attraction for me,

## *My First Fall.*

but I heard older boys say that it was a manly thing to lead girls astray, and I was ambitious to be not only a good thief, but a hard case generally. When I was nine or ten years old I liked to boast of the conquests I had made among little working girls of fourteen or fifteen. We used to meet in the hall-ways of tenement houses, or at their homes, but there was no sentiment in the relations between us, at least on my part. My only pleasure in it was the delight of telling about it to my young companions.

When I was twelve years old I met a little girl for whom I had a somewhat different feeling. Nellie was a pretty, blue-eyed little creature, or "tid-bit," as we used to say, who lived near my home on Cherry Street. I used to take her over on the ferry for a ride, or treat her to ice-cream ; and we were really chums ; but when I began to make money I lost my interest in her ; partly, too, because at that time I made the acquaintance of a married woman of about twenty-five years old. She discovered me one day in the hallway with Nellie, and threatened to tell the holy brother on us if I didn't fetch her a pint of beer. I took the beer to her room, and that

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

began a relationship of perhaps a year. She used to stake me to a part of the money her husband, a workingman, brought her every Saturday night.

Although the girls meant very little to me until several years later, I nevertheless began when I was about fifteen to spend a great deal of money on them. It was the thing to do, and I did it with a good grace. I used to take all kinds of working girls to the balls in Walhalla Hall in Orchard Street ; or in Pythagoras, or Beethoven Halls, where many pretty little German girls of respectable families used to dance on Saturday nights. It was my pride to buy them things—clothes, pins, and to take them on excursions ; for was I not a rising “gun,” with money in my pocket ? Money, however, that went as easily as it had come.

Perhaps if I had been able to save money at that time I might not have fallen (that is, been arrested) so early. My first fall came, however, when I was fifteen years old ; and if I was not a confirmed thief already, I certainly was one by the time I left the Tombs, where I stayed ten days. It happened this way. Zack and I were grafting, buzzing Molls, with

## *My First Fall.*

a pal named Jack, who afterwards became a famous burglar. He had just escaped from the Catholic Protectory, and told us his troubles. Instead of being alarmed, however, I grew bolder, for if Jack could "beat" the "Proteck" in three months, I argued I could do it in twenty-four hours. We three ripped things open for some time; but one day we were grafting on Sixth Avenue, just below Twentieth Street, when I fell for a "leather." The "sucker," a good-looking Moll was coming up the Avenue. Her "book," which looked fat, was sticking out of her skirt. I, who was the "wire," gave Jack and Zack the tip (thief's cough), and they stalled, one in front, one behind. The girl did not "blow" (take alarm) and I got hold of the leather easily. It looked like a get-away, for no one on the sidewalk saw us. But as bad luck would have it, a negro coachman, standing in the street by the pavement, got next, and said to me, "What are you doing there?" I replied, "Shut up, and I'll give you two dollars." But he caught hold of me and shouted for the police. I passed the leather to Jack, who "vamoosed." Zack hit the negro in the face and I ran up Seventh Avenue, but was caught

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

by a flyman (policeman), and taken to the station house.

On the way to the police station I cried bitterly, for, after all, I was only a boy. I realized for the first time that the way of the transgressor is hard. It was in the afternoon, and I spent the time until next morning at ten, when I was to appear before the magistrate, in a cell in the station-house, in the company of an old grafter. In the adjoining cells were drunkards, street-walkers and thieves who had been "lined up" for the night, and I spent the long hours in crying and in listening to their indecent songs and jokes. The old grafter called to one of the Tenderloin girls that he had a kid with him who was arrested for Moll-buzzing. At this they all expressed their sympathy with me by saying that I would either be imprisoned for life or be hanged. They got me to sing a song, and I convinced them that I was tough.

In the morning I was arraigned in the police court. As there was no stolen property on me, and as the sucker was not there to make a complaint, I was "settled" for assault only, and sent to the Tombs for ten days.

My experience in the Tombs may fairly be

## *My First Fall.*

called, I think, the turning point of my life. It was there that I met "de mob". I learned new tricks in the Tombs ; and more than that, I began definitely to look upon myself as a criminal. The Tombs of twenty years ago was even less cheerful than it is at present. The Boys' Prison faced the Women's Prison, and between these two was the place where those sentenced to death were hanged. The boys knew when an execution was to take place, and we used to talk it over among ourselves. One man was hanged while I was there ; and if anybody thinks that knowledge of such things helps to make boys seek the path of virtue, let him go forth into the world and learn something about human nature.

On my arrival in the Tombs, Mrs. Hill, the matron, had me searched for tobacco, knives or matches, all of which were contraband ; then I was given a bath and sent into the corridor of the cells where there were about twenty-five other boys, confined for various crimes, ranging from petty larceny to offenses of the gravest kind. On the second day I met two young "dips" and we exchanged our experiences in the world of graft. I received my first lesson in the art of "banging a super,"

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

that is, stealing a watch by breaking the ring with the thumb and forefinger, and thus detaching it from the chain. They were two of the best of the Sixth Ward pickpockets, and we made a date to meet "on the outside." Indeed, it was not many weeks after my release before I could "bang a super," or get a man's "front" (watch and chain) as easily as I could relieve a Moll of her "leather".

As I look back upon the food these young boys received in the tombs, it seems to me of the worst. Breakfast consisted of a chunk of poor bread and a cup of coffee made of burnt bread crust. At dinner we had soup (they said, at least, there was meat in it), bread and water; and supper was the same as breakfast. But we had one consolation. When we went to divine service we generally returned happy; not because of what the good priest said, but because we were almost sure of getting tobacco from the women inmates.

Certainly the Gerry Society has its faults; but since its organization young boys who have gone wrong but are not yet entirely hardened, have a much better show to become good citizens than they used to have. That Society did not exist in my day; but I know



## *My First Fall.*

a good deal about it, and I am convinced that it does a world of good ; for, at least, when it takes children into its charge it does not surround them with an atmosphere of social crime.

While in the Tombs I experienced my first disillusionment as to the honor of thieves. I was an impulsive, imaginative boy, and that a pal could go back on me never seemed possible. Many of my subsequent misfortunes were due to the treachery of my companions. I have learned to distrust everybody, but as a boy of fifteen I was green, and so the treachery I shall relate left a sore spot in my soul.

It happened this way. On a May day, about two months before I was arrested, two other boys and I had entered the basement of a house where the people were moving, had made away with some silverware, and sold it to a Christian woman in the neighborhood for one twentieth of its value. When I had nearly served my ten days' sentence for assault, my two pals were arrested and "squealed" on me. I was confronted with them in the Tombs. At first I was mighty glad to see them, but when I found they had "squealed," I set my teeth and denied all knowledge of the "touch."

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

I protested my innocence so violently that the police thought the other boys were merely seeking a scape-goat. They got twenty days and my term expired forty-eight hours afterwards. The silverware I stole that May morning is now an heirloom in the family of the Christian woman to whom I sold it so cheap.

If I had always been as earnest a liar as I was on that occasion in the Tombs I might never have gone to "stir" (penitentiary); but I grew more indifferent and desperate as time went on; and, in a way, more honest, more sincerely a criminal: I hardly felt like denying it. I know some thieves who, although they have grafted for twenty-five years, have not yet "done time"; some of them escaped because they knew how to throw the innocent "con" so well. Take Tim, for instance. Tim and I grafted together as boys. He was not a very skilful pickpocket, and he often was on the point of arrest; but he had a talent for innocence, and the indignation act he would put up would melt a heart of stone. He has, consequently, never been in stir, while I, a much better thief, have spent half of my adult life there. That was partly because I

## *My First Fall.*

felt, when I had once made a touch, that the property belonged to me. On one occasion I had robbed a "bloke" of his "red super" (gold watch), and made away with it all right, when I carelessly dropped it on the sidewalk. A crowd had gathered about, and no man really in his right mind, would have picked up that super. But I did it, and was nailed dead to rights by a "cop." Some time afterwards a pal asked me why the deuce I had been so foolish. "Didn't the super belong to me," I replied, indignantly. "Hadn't I earned it?" I was too honest a thief. That was one of my weaknesses.

## CHAPTER III.

### *Mixed-Ale Life in the Fourth and Seventh Wards.*

FOR a time—a short time—after I left the Tombs I was quiet. My relatives threw the gallows “con” into me hard, but at that time I was proof against any arguments they could muster. They were not able to show me anything that was worth while; they could not deliver the goods, so what was the use of talking?

Although I was a disgrace at home, I was high cock-a-lorum among the boys in the neighborhood. They began to look up to me, as I had looked up to the grafters at the corner saloon. They admired me because I was a fighter and had “done time.” I went up in their estimation because I had suffered in the good cause. And I began to get introductions to the older grafters in the seventh ward—grafters with diamond pins and silk hats. It was not long before I was at it harder than ever, uptown and downtown. I not only continued my trade as Moll-buzzer, but began to

## *Mixed-Ale Life.*

spread myself, got to be quite an adept in touching men for vests and supers and fronts ; and every now and then "shoved the queer" or worked a little game of swindling. Our stamping-ground for supers and vests at that time was Fulton, Nassau, Lower Broadway and Wall Streets, and we covered our territory well. I used to work alone considerably. I would board a car with a couple of newspapers, would say, "News, boss?" to some man sitting down, would shove the paper in front of his face as a stall, and then pick his super or even his entire "front" (watch and chain). If you will stand for a newspaper under your chin I can get even your socks. Many is the "gent" I have left in the car with his vest entirely unbuttoned and his "front" gone. When I couldn't get the chain, I would snap the ring of the watch with my thumb and fore-finger, giving the thief's cough to drown the slight noise made by the breaking ring, and get away with the watch, leaving the chain dangling. Instead of a newspaper, I would often use an overcoat as a stall.

It was only when I was on the "hurry-up," however, that I worked alone. It is more dangerous than working with a mob, but if I

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

needed a dollar quick I'd take any risk. I'd jump on a car, and tackle the first sucker I saw. If I thought it was not diplomatic to try for the "front," and if there was no stone in sight, I'd content myself with the "clock" (watch). But it was safer and more sociable to work with other guys. We usually went in mobs of three or four, and our methods were much more complicated than when we were simply moll-buzzing. Each thief had his special part to play, and his duty varied with the position of the sucker and the pocket the "leather" was in. If the sucker was standing in the car, my stall would frequently stand right in front, facing him, while I would put my hand under the stall's arm and pick the sucker's leather or super. The other stalls would be distracting the attention of the sucker, or looking out for possible interruptions. When I had got possession of the leather I would pass it quickly to the stall behind me, and he would "vamoose." Sometimes I would back up to the victim, put my hand behind me, break his ring and pick the super, or I would face his back, reach round, unbutton his vest while a pal stalled in front with a newspaper, a bunch of flowers, a fan,

or an overcoat, and get away with his entire front.

A dip, as I have said, pays special attention to his personal appearance ; it is his stock in trade ; but when I began to meet boys who had risen above the grade of Moll-buzzers, I found that the dip, as opposed to other grafters, had many other advantages, too. He combines pleasure and instruction with business, for he goes to the foot-ball games, the New London races, to swell theatres where the graft is good, and to lectures. I have often listened to Bob Ingersoll, the greatest orator, in my opinion, that ever lived. I enjoyed his talk so much that I sometimes forgot to graft. But as a general rule, I was able to combine instruction with business. I very seldom dropped a red super because of an oratorical flourish ; but the supers did not come my way all the time, I had some waiting to do, and in the meantime I improved my mind. Then a dip travels, too, more than most grafters ; he jumps out to fairs and large gatherings of all descriptions, and grows to be a man of the world. When in the city he visits the best dance halls, and is popular because of his good clothes, his dough, and

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

his general information, with men as well as women. He generally lives with a Moll who has seen the world, and who can add to his fund of information. I know a dip who could not read or write until he met a Moll, who gave him a general education and taught him to avoid things that interfered with his line of graft; she also took care of his personal appearance, and equipped him generally for an A No. 1 pickpocket. Women are much the same, I believe, in every rank of life.

It was at this time, when I was a kid of fifteen, that I first met Sheenie Annie, who was a famous shop-lifter. She was twenty-one years old, and used to give me good advice. "Keep away from heavy workers," (burglars) she would say; "there is a big bit in that." She had lived in Graftdom ever since she was a tid-bit, and she knew what she was talking about. I did not work with her until several years later, but I might as well tell her sad story now. I may say, as a kind of preface, that I have always liked the girl grafter who could take care of herself instead of sucking the blood out of some man. When I find a little working girl who has no other ambition than to get a little home together,



with a little knick-knack on the wall, a little husband and a little child, I don't care for her. She is a nonentity. But such was not Sheenie Annie, who was a bright, intelligent, ambitious, girl; when she liked a fellow she would do anything for him, but otherwise she wouldn't let a man come near her.

The little Jewish lassie, named Annie, was born in the toughest part of New York. Later on, as she advanced in years and became an expert pilferer, she was given the nickname of "Sheenie." She was brought up on the street, surrounded by thieves and prostitutes. Her only education was what she received during a year or two in the public school. She lived near Grand Street, then a popular shopping district. As a very little girl she and a friend used to visit the drygoods stores and steal any little notion they could. There was a crowd of young pickpockets in her street, and she soon got on to this graft, and became so skilful at it that older guns of both sexes were eager to take her under their tuition and finish her education. The first time I met her was in a well-known dance-hall—Billy McGlory's—and we became friends at once, for she was a good girl and full of mischief.

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

She was not pretty, exactly, but she was passable. She was small, with thick lips, plump, had good teeth and eyes as fine and piercing as any I ever saw in man or woman. She dressed well and was a good talker, as nimble-witted and as good a judge of human nature as I ever met in her sex.

Sheenie Annie's graft broadened, and from dipping and small shop-lifting she rose to a position where she doubled up with a mob of clever hotel workers, and made large amounts of money. Here was a girl from the lowest stratum of life, not pretty or well shaped, but whom men admired because of her wit and cleverness. A big contractor in Philadelphia was her friend for years. I have seen letters from him offering to marry her. But she had something better.

For she was an artist at "penny-weighting" and "hoisting." The police admitted that she was unusually clever at these two grafts, and they treated her with every consideration. Penny-weighting is a very "slick" graft. It is generally worked in pairs, by either sex or both sexes. A man, for instance, enters a jewelry store and looks at some diamond rings on a tray. He prices them and notes the

costly ones. Then he goes to a fauny shop (imitation jewelry) and buys a few diamonds which match the real ones he has noted. Then he and his pal, usually a woman, enter the jewelry store and ask to see the rings. Through some little "con" they distract the jeweler's attention, and then one of them (and at this Sheenie Annie was particularly good) substitutes the bogus diamonds for the good ones; and leaves the store without making a purchase.

I can give an example of how Sheenie Annie "hoisted," from my own experience with her. On one occasion, when I was about eighteen years old, Sheenie and I were on a racket together. We had been "going it" for several days and needed some dough. We went into a large tailoring establishment, where I tried on some clothes, as a stall. Nothing suited me.—I took good care of that—but in the meantime Annie had taken two costly overcoats, folded them into flat bundles, and, raising her skirt quickly, had hidden the overcoats between her legs. We left the store together. She walked so straight that I thought she had got nothing, but when we entered a saloon a block away, and the swag was produced, I was

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

forced to laugh. We "fenced" the overcoats and with the proceeds continued our spree.

Once Sheenie "fell" at this line of graft. She had stolen some costly sealskins from a well-known furrier, and had got away with them. But on her third visit to the place she came to grief. She was going out with a seal-skin coat under her skirt when the office-boy, who was skylarking about, ran into her, and upset her. When the salesman, who had gone to her rescue, lifted her up, she lost her grip on the sealskin sacque, and it fell to the floor. It was a "blow," of course, and she got nailed, but as she had plenty of fall-money, and a well-known politician dead to rights, she only got nine months in the penitentiary.

Sheenie Annie was such a good shop-lifter that, with only an umbrella as a stall, she could make more money in a week than a poor needle-woman could earn in months. But she did not care for the money. She was a good fellow, and was in for fun. She was "wise," too, and I liked to talk to her, for she understood what I said, and was up to snuff, which was very piquant to me. She had done most of the grafts that I had done myself, and her tips were always valuable.

To show what a good fellow she was, her sweetheart, Jack, and another burglar named Jerry were doing night work once, when they were unlucky enough to be nailed. Sheenie Annie went on the stand and swore perjury in order to save Jack. He got a year, but Jerry, who had committed the same crime, got six. While he was in prison Annie visited him and put up a plan by which he escaped, but he would not leave New York with her, and was caught and returned to "stir." Annie herself fell in half a dozen cities, but never received more than a few months. After I was released from serving my second bit in the "pen," I heard Annie had died insane. An old girl pal of hers told me that she had died a horrible death, and that her last words were about her old friends and companions. Her disease was that which attacks only people with brains. She died of paresis.

Two other girls whom I knew when I was fifteen turned out to be famous shop-lifters—Big Lena and Blonde Mamie, who afterwards married Tommy, the famous cracksman. They began to graft when they were about fourteen, and Mamie and I used to work together. I was Mamie's first "fellow," and we had royal

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

good times together. Lena, poor girl, is now doing five years in London, but she was one of the most cheerful Molls I ever knew. I met her and Mamie for the first time one day as they were coming out of an oyster house on Grand Street. I thought they were good-looking tid-bits, and took them to a picnic. We were so late that instead of going home Mamie and I spent the night at the house of Lena's sister, whose husband was a receiver of stolen goods, or "fence," as it is popularly called. In the morning Lena, Mamie and I made our first "touch" together. We got a few "books" uptown, and Mamie banged a satchel at Stern's. After that we often jumped out together, and took in the excursions. Sometimes Mamie or Lena would dip and I would stall, but more frequently I was the pick. We used to turn our swag over to Lena's sister's husband, Max, who would give us about one-sixth of its value.

These three girls certainly were a crack-a-jack trio. You can't find their likes nowadays. Even in my time most of the girls I knew did not amount to anything. They generally married, or did worse. There were few legitimate grafters among them. Since I have been

*Mixed-Ale Life.*

back this time I have seen a great many of the old picks and night-workers I used to know. They tell the same story. There are no Molls now who can compare with Big Lena, Blonde Mamie, and Sheenie Annie. Times are bad, anyway.

After my experience in the Tombs I rose very rapidly in the world of graft, and distanced my old companions. Zack, the lad with whom I had touched my first Moll, soon seemed very tame to me. I fell away from him because he continued to eat bolivers (cookies), patronize the free baths, and stole horse-blankets and other trivial things when he could not get "leathers." He was not fast enough for me. Zack "got there," nevertheless, and for little or nothing, for several years later I met him in State's prison. He told me he was going to Colorado on his release. I again met him in prison on my second bit. He was then going to Chicago. On my third hit I ran up against the same old jail-bird, but this time his destination was Boston. To-day he is still in prison.

As I fell away from the softies I naturally joined hands with more ambitious grafters, and with those with brains and with good con-

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

nections in the upper world. As a lad of from fifteen to eighteen I associated with several boys who are now famous politicians in this city, and "on the level," as that phrase is usually meant. Jack Lawrence was a well-educated boy, and high up as far as his family was concerned. His father and brothers held good political positions, and it was only a taste for booze and for less genteel grafting that held Jack back. As a boy of sixteen or seventeen he was the trusted messenger of a well-known Republican politician, named J. I. D. One of Jack's pals became a Federal Judge, and another, Mr. D——, who was never a grafter, is at present a city magistrate in New York.

While Jack was working for J. I. D., the politician, he was arrested several times. Once he abstracted a large amount of money from the vest pocket of a broker as he was standing by the old *Herald* building. He was nailed, and sent word to his employer, the politician, who went to police headquarters, highly indignant at the arrest of his trusted messenger. He easily convinced the broker and the magistrate that Jack was innocent; and as far as the Republican politician's business was con-



cerned, Jack was honest, for J. I. D. trusted him, and Jack never deceived him. There are some thieves who will not "touch " those who place confidence in them, and Jack was one of them.

After he was released, the following conversation, which Jack related to me, took place between him and the politician, in the latter's office.

"How was it?" the Big One said, "that you happened to get your fingers into that man's pocket?"

Jack gave the "innocent con."

"None of that," said J. I. D., who was a wise guy, "I know you have a habit of taking small change from strangers' pockets."

Jack then came off his perch and gave his patron a lesson in the art of throwing the mit (dipping). At this the politician grinned, and remarked: "You will either become a reputable politician, for you have the requisite character, or you will die young."

Jack was feared, hated and envied by the other young fellows in J. I. D.'s office, for as he was such a thorough rascal, he was a great favorite with those high up. But he never got J. I. D.'s full confidence until after he was

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

tested in the following way. One day the politician put his gold watch on a table in his office. Jack saw it, picked it up and put it in the Big One's drawer. The latter entered the room, saw that the watch was gone, and said : "I forgot my watch. I must have left it home."

"No," said Jack, "you left it on the table, and I put it in your desk." A smile spread over the patron's face.

"Jack, I can trust you. I put it there just to test your honesty."

The boy hesitated a moment, then, looking into the man's face, replied ; "I know right well you did, for you are a wise guy."

After that J. I. D. trusted Jack even with his love affairs.

As Jack advanced in life he became an expert "gun," and was often nailed, and frequently brought before Magistrate D——, his old friend. He always got the benefit of the doubt. One day he was arraigned before the magistrate, who asked the flyman the nature of the complaint. It was the same as usual—dipping. Jack, of course, was indignant at such an awful accusation, but the magistrate told him to keep still, and, turning to the police-

man, asked the culprit's name. When the copper told him, the magistrate exclaimed :

"Why, that is not his name. I knew him twenty years ago, and he was a d—— rascal then ; but that was not his name."

Jack was shocked at such language from the bench, and swore with such vehemence that he was innocent, that he again got the benefit of the doubt, and was discharged, and this time justly, for he had not made this particular "touch." He was hounded by a copper looking for a reputation. Jack, when he was set free, turned to the magistrate, and said : "Your honor, I thank you, but you only did your duty to an innocent man." The magistrate had a good laugh, and remarked : "Jack, I wouldn't believe you if you swore on a stack of Bibles."

A curious trait in a professional grafter is that, if he is "pinched" for something he did not do, although he has done a hundred other things for which he has never been pinched, he will put up such a wail against the abominable injustice that an honest man accused of the same offense would seem guilty in comparison. The honest man, even if he had the ability of a Philadelphia lawyer, could not do

## *The Autobiography of a Thief.*

the strong indignation act that is characteristic of the unjustly accused grafter. Old thieves guilty of a thousand crimes will nourish revenge for years against the copper or judge who sends them up to "stir" on a false accusation.

When I was from fifteen to seventeen years old, I met the man who, some think, is now practically leader of Tammany Hall. I will call him Senator Wet Coin. At that time he was a boy eighteen or nineteen and strictly on the level. He knew all the grafters well, but kept off the Rocky Path himself. In those days he "hung out" in an oyster shanty and ran a paper stand. It is said he materially assisted Mr. Pulitzer in making a success of the *World*, when that paper was started. He never drank, in spite of the name I have given him. In fact, he derived his real nickname from his habit of abstinence. He was the friend of a Bowery girl who is now a well-known actress. She, too, was always on the level in every way ; although her brother was a grafter ; this case, and that of Senator Wet Coin prove that even in an environment of thieves it is possible to tread the path of virtue. Wet Coin would not even buy a stolen

article ; and his reward was great. He became captain of his election district, ran for assemblyman, was elected, and got as high a position, with the exception of that of Governor, as is possible in the State ; while in the city, probably no man is more powerful.

Senator Wet Coin made no pretensions to virtue ; he never claimed to be better than others. But in spite of the accusations against him, he has done far more for the public good than all the professional reformers, religious and other. He took many noted and professional criminals in the prime of their success, gave them positions and by his influence kept them honest ever since. Some of them are high up, even run gin-mills to-day. I met one of them after my second bit, who used to make his thousands. Now he has a salary of eighteen dollars a week and is contented. I had known him in the old days, and he asked :

“What are you doing ?”

“The same old thing,” I admitted. “What are you up to ?”

“I have squared it, Jim,” he replied earnestly. “There’s nothing in the graft. Why don’t you go to sea ?”

“I’d as lief go to stir,” I replied.

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

We had a couple of beers and a long talk, and this is the way he gave it to me :

“I never thought I could live on eighteen dollars a week. I have to work hard but I save more money than I did when I was making hundreds a week ; for when it comes hard, it does not go easy. I look twice at my earnings before I part with them. I live quietly with my sister and am happy. There’s nothing in the other thing, Jim. Look at Hope. Look at Dan Noble. Look at all the other noted grafters who stole millions and now are willing to throw the brotherly hand for a small borrow. If I had the chance to make thousands to-morrow in the under world, I would not chance it. I am happy. Better still, I am contented. Only for Mr. Wet Coin I’d be splitting matches in the stir these many years. Show me the reformer who has done as much for friends and the public as Wet Coin.”

A “touch” that pleased me mightily as a kid was made just before my second fall. Superintendent Walling had returned from a summer resort, and found that a mob of “knucks” (another name for pick-pockets) had been “tearing open” the Third Avenue

*Mixed-Ale Life.*

cars outside of the Post Office. About fifty complaints had been coming in every day for several weeks ; and the Superintendent thought he would make a personal investigation and get one of the thieves dead to rights. He made a front that he was easy and went down the line. He did not catch any dips, but when he reached police head-quarters he was minus his gold watch and two hundred and fifty dollars in money. The story leaked out, and Superintendent Walling was unhappy. There would never have been a come-back for this "touch" if an old gun, who had just been nailed, had not "squealed" as to who touched the boss. "Little Mick" had done it, and the result was that he got his first experience in the House of Refuge.

It was only a short time after Little Mick's fall that it came my turn to go to the House of Refuge. I had grown tougher and much stuck on myself and was taking bigger risks. I certainly had a swelled head in those days. I was seventeen years old at the time, and was grafting with Jack T——, who is now in Byrnes's book, and one of the swellest "Peter" men (safe-blowers) in the profession. Jack and I, along with another pal, Joe Quigley, got a

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

duffer, an Englishman, for his "front," on Grand Street, near Broadway. It was a "blow," and I, who was the "wire," got nailed. If I had not given my age as fifteen I should have been sent to the penitentiary. As it was I went to the House of Refuge for a year. Joe Quigley slipped up on the same game. He was twenty, but gave his age as fifteen. He had had a good shave by the Tombs barber, there was a false date of birth written in his Aunt's Bible, which was produced in court by his lawyer, and he would probably have gone with me to the House of Refuge, had not a Central Office man who knew him, happened in ; Joe was settled for four years in Sing Sing.

When I arrived at the House of Refuge, my pedigree was taken and my hair clipped. Then I went into the yard, looked down the line of boys on parade and saw about forty young grafters whom I knew. One of them is now a policeman in New York City, and, moreover, on the level. Some others, too, but not many, who were then in the House of Refuge, are now honest. Several are running big saloons and are captains of their election districts, or even higher up. These men are



exceptions, however, for certainly the House of Refuge was a school for crime. Unspeakably bad habits were contracted there. The older boys wrecked the younger ones, who, comparatively innocent, confined for the crime of being orphans, came in contact with others entirely hardened. The day time was spent in the school and the shop, but there was an hour or two for play, and the boys would arrange to meet for mischief in the basement.

Severe punishments were given to lads of fifteen, and their tasks were harder than those inflicted in State's prison. We had to make twenty-four pairs of overalls every day ; and if we did not do our work we were beaten on an unprotected and tender spot until we promised to do our task. One morning I was made to cross my hands, and was given fifteen blows on the palms with a heavy rattan stick. The crime I had committed was inattention. The principal had been preaching about the Prodigal Son. I, having heard it before, paid little heed ; particularly as I was a Catholic, and his teachings did not count for me. They called me a " Papist," and beat me, as I described.

I say without hesitation that lads sent to an institution like the House of Refuge, the

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

Catholic Protectory, or the Juvenile Asylum, might better be taken out and shot. They learn things there they could not learn even in the streets. The newsboy's life is pure in comparison. As for me, I grew far more desperate there than I had been before: and I was far from being one of the most innocent of boys. Many of the others had more to learn than I had, and they learned it. But even I, hard as I already was, acquired much fresh information about vice and crime; and gathered in more pointers about the technique of graft.

## CHAPTER IV.

### *When the Graft Was Good.*

I STAYED in the House of Refuge until I was eighteen, and when released, went through a short period of reform. I "lasted," I think, nearly three weeks, and then started in to graft again harder than ever. The old itch for excitement, for theatres, balls and gambling, made reform impossible. I had already formed strong habits and desires which could not be satisfied in my environment without stealing. I was rapidly becoming a confirmed criminal. I began to do "house-work," which was mainly sneak work up town. We would catch a basement open in the day time, and rummage for silverware, money or jewels. There is only a step from this to the business of the genuine burglar, who operates in the night time, and whose occupation is far more dangerous than that of the sneak thief. However, at this intermediate kind of graft, our swag, for eighteen months, was considerable.

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

One of our methods was to take servant girls to balls and picnics and get them to tip us off to where the goods were and the best way to get them. Sometimes they were guilty, more often merely suckers.

During the next three years, at the expiration of which I made my first trip to Sing Sing, I stole a great deal of money and lived very high. I contracted more bad habits, practically ceased to see my family at all, lived in a furnished room and "hung out" in the evening at some dance-hall, such as Billy McGlory's Old Armory, George Doe's or "The" Allen's. Sheenie Annie was my sweetheart at this period, and after we had made a good touch what times we would have at Coney Island or at Billy McGlory's! Saturday nights in the summer time a mob of three or four of us, grafters and girls, would go to the island and stop at a hotel run by an ex-gun. At two or three o'clock in the morning we'd all leave the hotel, with nothing on but a quilt, and go in swimming together. Sheenie Annie, Blonde Mamie and Big Lena often went with us. At other times we took respectable shop-girls, or even women who belonged to a still lower class. What boy with an

*When the Graft Was Good.*

ounce of thick blood in his body could refuse to go with a girl to the Island?

And Billy McGlory's! What times we had there, on dear old Saturday nights! At this place, which contained a bar-room, dance-room, pool-room and a piano, congregated downtown guns, house-men and thieves of both sexes. No rag-time was danced in those days, but early in the morning we had plenty of the cancan. The riots that took place there would put to shame anything that goes on now. \* I never knew the town so tight-shut as it is at present. It is far better, from a moral point of view than it has ever been before; at least, in my recollection. "The" Allen's was in those days a grade more decent than McGlory's; for at "The's" nobody who did not wear a collar and coat was admitted. I remember a pal of mine who met a society lady on a slumming expedition with a reporter. It was at McGlory's. The lady looked upon the grafter she had met as a novelty. The grafter looked upon the lady in the same way, but consented to write her an article on the Bowery. He sent her the following composition, which he showed to me first, and allowed me

\* Summer of 1902

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

to copy it. I always did like freaks. I won't put in the bad grammar and spelling, but the rest is :

“While strolling, after the midnight hour, along the Lane, that historic thoroughfare sometimes called the Bowery, I dropped into a concert hall. At a glance, I saw men who worked hard during the week and needed a little recreation. Near them were their sisters (that is, if we all belong to the same human family), who had fallen by the wayside. A man was trying to play a popular song on a squeaky piano, while another gent tried to sing the first part of the song, when the whole place joined in the chorus with a zest. I think the song was most appropriate. It was a ditty of the slums entitled, ‘Dear Old Saturday Night.’ ”

When I was about nineteen I took another and important step in the world of graft. One night I met a couple of swell grafters, one of whom is at the present time a Pinkerton detective. They took me to the Haymarket, where I met a crowd of guns who were making barrels of money. Two of them, Dutch Lonzo and Charlie Allen, became my friends, and introduced me to Mr. R——, who

has often kept me out of prison. He was a go-between, a lawyer, and well-known to all good crooks. If we "fell" we had to notify him and he would set the underground wires working, with the result that our fall money would need replenishing badly, but that we'd escape the stir.

That I was not convicted again for three years was entirely due to my fall money and to the cleverness of Mr. R——. Besides these expenses, which I considered legitimate, I used to get "shaken down" regularly by the police and detectives. The following is a typical case :

I was standing one day on the corner of Grand Street and the Bowery when a copper who knew me came up and said : "There's a lot of knocking (complaining) going on about the Grand Street cars being torn open. The old man (the chief) won't stand for it much longer."

"It wasn't me," I said.

"Well, it was one of the gang," he replied, "and I will have to make an arrest soon, or take some one to headquarters for his mug," (that is, to have his picture taken for the rogues' gallery).

## *The Autobiography of a Thief.*

I knew what that meant, and so I gave him a twenty dollar bill. But I was young and often objected to these exorbitant demands. More than anybody else a thief hates to be "touched," for he despises the sucker on whom he lives. And we were certainly touched with great regularity by the coppers.

Still, we really had nothing to complain of in those days, for we made plenty of money and had a good time. We even used to buy our collars, cuffs and gloves cheap from grafters who made it their business to steal those articles. They were cheap guns,—pipe fiends, petty larceny thieves and shop-lifters—but they helped to make our path smoother.

After I met the Haymarket grafter I used to jump out to neighboring cities on very profitable business. A good graft was to work the fairs at Danbury, Waverly, Philadelphia and Pittsburg, and the foot-ball games at Princeton. I always travelled with three or four others, and went for gatherings where we knew we would find "roofers," or country gentlemen. On my very first jump-out I got a fall, but the copper was open to reason. Dutch Lonzo and Charlie Allen, splendid pickpockets, (I always went with good thieves,



*When the Graft Was Good.*

for I had become a first-class dip and had a good personal appearance) were working with me in Newark, where Vice-President Hendricks was to speak. I picked a watch in the crowd, and was nailed. But Dutch Lonzo, who had the gift of gab better than any man I ever met, took the copper into a saloon. We all had a drink, and for twenty-five dollars I escaped even the station-house. Unfortunately, however, I was compelled to return the watch; for the copper had to "square" the sucker. Then the copper said to Dutch Lonzo, whom he knew: "Go back and graft, if you want, but be sure to look me up." In an hour or two we got enough touches to do us for two weeks. Senator Wet Coin was at this speech with about two hundred Tammany braves, and we picked so many pockets that a newspaper the next day said there must have been at least one hundred and ninety-nine pickpockets in the Tammany delegation. We fell quite often on these trips, but we were always willing to help the coppers pay for their lower flats. I sometimes objected because of their exorbitant demands, but I was still young. I knew that longshoremen did harder work for less pay than the coppers,

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

and I thought, therefore, that the latter were too eager to make money on a sure-thing graft. And I always hated a sure-thing graft.

But didn't we strike it rich in Connecticut! Whether the people of that State suffer from partial paralysis or not I don't know, but certainly if all States were as easy as Connecticut the guns would set up as Vanderbilts. I never even got a tumble in Connecticut. I ripped up the fairs in every direction, and took every chance. The inhabitants were so easy that we treated them with contempt.

After a long trip in Connecticut I nearly fell on my return, I was that raw. We were breech-getting (picking men's pockets) in the Brooklyn cars. I was stalling in front, Lonzo was behind and Charlie was the pick. Lonzo telephoned to me by gestures that Charlie had hold of the leather, but it wouldn't come. I was hanging on a strap, and, pretending to slip, brought my hand down heavily on the sucker's hat, which went over his ears. The leather came, was slipped to me, Lonzo apologized for spoiling the hat and offered the sucker a five dollar bill, which he politely refused. Now that was rough work, and we would not have done it, had we not been travelling so long

*When the Graft Was Good.*

among the Reubs in Connecticut. We could have made our gets all right, but we were so confident and delayed so long that the sucker blew before we left the car, and Lonzo and Charlie were nailed, and the next morning arraigned. In the meantime, however, we had started the wires working, and notified Mr. R.—and Lonzo's wife to "fix" things in Brooklyn. The reliable attorney got a bondsman, and two friends of his "fixed" the cops, who made no complaint. Lonzo's wife, an Irishwoman and a handsome grafter, had just finished a five year bit in London. It cost us six hundred dollars to "fix" that case, and there was only two hundred and fifty dollars in the leather.

That made Lonzo's wife exceedingly angry.

"Good Lord," she said. "There's panthers for you in New York! There's the blokes that shakes you down too heavy. I'd want an unlimited cheque on the Bank of England if you ever fell again."

A little philosophy on the same subject was given me one day by an English Moll, who had fallen up-State and had to "give up" heavily.

"I've been in a good many cities and 'amlets

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

in this country," said she, "but gad! blind me if I ever want to fall in an 'amlet in this blooming State again. The New York police are at least a little sensible at times, but when these Rufus's up the State get a Yorker or a wise guy, they'll strip him down to his socks. One of these voracious country coppers who sing sweet hymns in jail is a more successful gun than them that hit the rocky path and take brash to get the long green. It is only the grafter that is supposed to protect the people who makes a success of it. The hypocritical mouthings of these people just suit the size of their Bibles."

Lonzo and I, and Patsy, a grafter I had picked up about this time, made several fat trips to Philadelphia. At first we were leary of the department stores, there had been so many "hollers," and worked the "rattlers" (cars) only. We were told by some local guns that we could not "last" twenty-four hours in Philadelphia without protection, but that was not our experience. We went easy for a time, but the chances were too good, and we began voraciously to tear open the department stores, the churches and the theatres; and without a fall. Whenever anybody mentioned the fly-cops (detectives) of Philadelphia it reminded

*When the Graft Was Good.*

us of the inhabitants of Connecticut. They were not "dead": such a word is sacred. Their proper place was not on the police force, but on a shelf in a Dutchman's grocery store labelled the canned article. Philadelphia was always my town, but I never stayed very long, partly because I did not want to become known in such a fat place, and partly because I could not bear to be away from New York very long; for, although there is better graft in other cities, there is no such place to live in as Manhattan. I had no fear of being known in Philadelphia to the police; but to local guns who would become jealous of our grafting and tip us off.

On one of my trips to the City of Brotherly Love I had a poetical experience. The graft had been good, and one Sunday morning I left Dan and Patsy asleep, and went for a walk in the country, intending, for a change, to observe the day of rest. I walked for several hours through a beautiful, quiet country, and about ten o'clock passed a country church. They were singing inside, and for some reason, probably because I had had a good walk in the country, the music affected me strangely. I entered, and saw a blind evangelist and his sister. I bowed my head, and my whole past

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

life came over me. Although everything had been coming my way, I felt uneasy, and thought of home for the first time in many weeks. I went back to the hotel in Philadelphia, feeling very gloomy, and shut myself up in my room. I took up my pen and began a letter to a Tommy (girl) in New York. But I could not forget the country church, and instead of writing to the little Tommy, I wrote the following jingles :

“When a child by mother’s knee  
I would watch, watch, watch  
By the deep blue sea,  
And the moon-beams played merrily  
On our home beside the sea.

CHORUS.

“The Evening Star shines bright-i-ly  
Above our home beside the sea,  
And the moon-beams danced beamingly  
On our home beside the sea.  
But now I am old, infirm and grey  
I shall never see those happy days ;  
I would give my life, all my wealth, and fame  
To hear my mother gently call my name.”

Towards evening Patsy and Dan returned from a good day’s work. Patsy noticed I was quiet and unusually gloomy, and asked :

*When the Graft Was Good.*

"What's the matter? Didn't you get anything?"

"No," I replied, "I'm going back to New York."

"Where have you been?" asked Dan.

"To church," I replied.

"In the city?" he asked.

"No," I replied, "in the country."

"I cautioned you," said Dan, "against taking such chances. There's no dough in these country churches. If you want to try lone ones on a Sunday take in some swell church in the city."

The following Sunday I went to a fashionable church and got a few leathers, and afterwards went to all the swell churches in the city. I touched them, but they could not touch me. I heard all the ministers in Philadelphia, but they could not move me the way that country evangelist did. They were all artificial in comparison.

Shortly after my poetical experience in Philadelphia I made a trip up New York State with Patsy, Dan and Joe, and grafted in a dozen towns. One day when we were on the cars going from Albany to Amsterdam, we saw a fat, sleepy-looking Dutchman, and I

nicked him for a clock as he was passing along the aisle to the end of the car. It took the Dutchman about ten minutes after he had returned to his seat to blow that his super was gone, and his chain hanging down. A look of stupid surprise spread over his innocent countenance. He looked all around, picked up the end of his chain, saw it was twisted, put his hand in his vest pocket, then looked again at the end of the chain, tried his pocket again, then went through all of his pockets, and repeated each of these actions a dozen times. The passengers all got "next," and began to grin. "Get on to the Hiker," (countryman) said Patsy to Joe, and they both laughed. I told the Dutchman that the clock must have fallen down the leg of his underwear; whereupon the Reuben retired to investigate, searched himself thoroughly and returned, only to go through the same motions, and then retire to investigate once more. It was as good as a comedy. But it was well there were no country coppers on that train. They would not have cared a rap about the Dutchman's loss of his property, but we four probably should have been compelled to divide with them.



*When the Graft Was Good.*

Grafters are a superstitious lot. Before we reached Buffalo a feeling came over me that I had better not work in that town ; so Joe, Dan and an English grafter we had picked up, named Scotty, stopped at Buffalo, and Patsy and I went on. Sure enough, in a couple of days Joe wired me that Scotty had fallen for a breech-kick and was held for trial. I wired to Mr. R——, who got into communication with Mr. J——, a Canadian Jew living in Buffalo, who set the wires going. The sucker proved a very hard man to square, but a politician who was a friend of Mr. J——showed him the errors of his way, and before very long Scotty returned to New York. An English Moll-buzzer, a girl, got hold of him and took him back to London. It was just as well, for it was time for our 'bunch to break up. We were getting too well-known ; and falls were coming too frequent. So we had a general split. Joe went to Washington, Patsy down East, Scotty to "stir" in London and I stayed in Manhattan, where I shortly afterwards met Big Jack and other burglars and started in on that dangerous graft. But before I tell about my work in that line, I will narrate the story of Mamie and Johnny, a famous cracksman,

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

whom I met at this time. It is a true love story of the Under World. Johnny, and Mamie, who by the way is not the same as Blonde Mamie, are still living together in New York City, after many trials and tribulations, one of the greatest of which was Mamie's enforced relation with a New York detective. But I won't anticipate on the story, which follows in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER V.

### *Mamie and the Negotiable Bonds.*

JOHNNY met Mamie when he was sixteen. At that time he was looked up to in the neighborhood as one of the most promising of the younger thieves.

He was an intelligent, enterprising boy and had, moreover, received an excellent education in the school of crime. His parents had died before he was twelve years old, and after that the lad lived at the Newsboys' Lodging House, in Rivington Street, which at that time and until it ceased to exist was the home of boys some of whom afterwards became the swellest of crooks, and some very reputable citizens and prominent politicians. A meal and a bed there cost six cents apiece and even the youngest and stupidest waif could earn or steal enough for that.

Johnny became an adept at "hooking" things from grocery stores and at tapping tills. When he was thirteen years old he was arrested for petty theft, passed a night in the

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

police station, and was sent to the Catholic Protectory, where he was the associate of boys much older and "wiser" in crime than he. At that place were all kinds of incurables, from those arrested for serious felonies to those who had merely committed the crime of being homeless. From them Johnny learned the ways of the under world very rapidly.

After a year of confinement he was clever enough to make a key and escape. He safely passed old "Cop O'Hagen," whose duty it was to watch the Harlem bridge, and returned to the familiar streets in lower New York, where the boys and rising pickpockets hid him from the police, until they forgot about his escape.

From that time Johnny's rise in the world of graft was rapid. He was so successful in stealing rope and copper from the dry-docks that the older heads took him in hand and used to put him through the "fan-light" windows of some store, where his haul was sometimes considerable. He began to grow rich, purchased some shoes and stockings, and assumed a "tough" appearance, with great pride. He rose a step higher, boarded tug-boats and ships anchored at the docks, and constantly increased his income. The boys looked upon

*Mamie and the Negotiable Bonds.*

him as a winner in his line of graft, and as he gave "hot'l" (lodging-house) money to those boys who had none, he was popular. So Johnny became "chesty", began to "spread" himself, to play pool, to wear good linen collars and to associate with the best young thieves in the ward.

It was at this time that he met Mamie, who was a year or two younger than he. She was a small, dark, pale-faced little girl, and as neat and quick-witted as Johnny. She lived with her parents, near the Newsboys' Lodging House, where Johnny still "hung out". Mamie's father and mother were poor, respectable people, who were born and bred in the old thirteenth ward, a section famous for the many shop girls who were fine "spielers" (dancers). Mamie's mother was one of the most skillful of these dancers, and therefore Mamie came by her passion for the waltz very naturally; and the light-footed little girl was an early favorite with the mixed crowd of dancers who used to gather at the old Concordia Assembly Rooms, on the Bowery.

It was at this place that Johnny and Mamie met for the first time. It was a case of mutual admiration, and the boy and girl started in to

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

“keep company.” Johnny became more ambitious in his line of graft ; he had a girl ! He needed money to buy her presents, to take her to balls, theatres and picnics ; and he began to “gun”, which means to pickpockets, an occupation which he found far more lucrative than “swagging” copper from the docks or going through fan-light windows. He did not remain content, however, with “dipping” and, with several much older “grafters”, he started in to do “drag” work.

“Drag” work is a rather complicated kind of stealing and success at it requires considerable skill. Usually a “mob” of four grafters work together. They get “tipped off” to some store where there is a line of valuable goods, perhaps a large silk or clothing-house. One of the four, called the “watcher”, times the last employee that leaves the place to be “touched”. The “watcher” is at his post again early in the morning, to find out at what time the first employee arrives. He may even hire a furnished room opposite the store, in order to secure himself against identification by some Central Office detective who might stroll by. When he has learned the hours of the employees he reports to his “pals”. At

## *Mamie and the Negotiable Bonds.*

a late hour at night the four go to the store, put a spindle in the Yale lock, and break it with a blow from a hammer. They go inside, take another Yale lock, which they have brought with them, lock themselves in, go upstairs, carry the most valuable goods downstairs and pile them near the door. Then they go away, and, in the morning, before the employees are due, they drive up boldly to the store with a truck ; representing a driver, two laborers, and a shipping clerk. They load the wagon with the goods, lock the door, and drive away. They have been known to do this work in full view of the unsuspecting policeman on the beat.

While Johnny had advanced to this distinguished work, Mamie, too, had become a bread-earner, of a more modest and a more respectable kind. She went to work in a factory, and made paper boxes for two and one-half dollars a week. So the two dressed very well, and had plenty of spending money. Unless Johnny had some work to do they always met in the evening, and soon were seriously in love with one another. Mamie knew what Johnny's line of business was, and admired his cleverness. The most progres-

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

sive people in her set believed in "getting on" in any way, and how could Mamie be expected to form a social morality for herself? She thought Johnny was the nicest boy in the world, and Johnny returned her love to the full. So Johnny finally asked her if she would "hitch up" with him for life, and she gladly consented.

They were married and set up a nice home in Allen Street. It was before the time when the Jews acquired an exclusive right to that part of the town, and in this neighborhood Mamie and Johnny had many friends who used to visit them in the evening; for the loving couple were exceedingly domestic, and, when Johnny had no business on hand, seldom went out in the evening. Johnny was a model husband. He had no bad habits, never drank or gambled, spent as much time as he could with his wife, and made a great deal of money. Mamie gave up her work in the shop, and devoted all her attention to making Johnny happy and his home pleasant.

For about four years Johnny and Mamie lived very happily together. Things came their way; and Johnny and his pals laid by a considerable amount of money against a rainy



*Mamie and the Negotiable Bonds.*

day. To be sure, they had their little troubles. Johnny "fell," that is to say, was arrested, a score of times, but succeeded in getting off. It was partly due to good luck, and partly to the large amount of fall-money he and his pals had gathered together.

On one occasion it was only Mamie's cleverness and devotion that saved Johnny, for a time, from the penitentiary. One dark night Johnny and three pals, after a long conversation in the saloon of a ward politician, visited a large jewelry store on Fulton Street, Brooklyn, artistically opened the safe, and made away with fifteen thousand dollars. It was a bold and famous robbery, and the search for the thieves was long and earnest. Johnny and his friends were not suspected at first, but an old saying among thieves is, "wherever there are three or four there is always a leak," a truth similar to that announced by Benjamin Franklin: "Three can keep a secret when two are dead."

One of Johnny's pals, Patsy, told his girl in confidence how the daring "touch" was made. That was the first link in the long chain of gossip which finally reached the ears of the watching detectives; and the result was that

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

Patsy and Johnny were arrested. It was impossible to "settle" this case, no matter how much "fall-money" they had at their disposal ; for the jeweler belonged to the Jewelers' Protective Association, which will prosecute those who rob anyone belonging to their organization.

As bribery was out of the question, Johnny and Patsy, who were what is called in the under world "slick articles," put their heads together, and worked out a scheme. The day of their trial in the Brooklyn Court came around. They were waiting their turn in the prisoner's "pen," adjoining the Court, when Mamie came to see them. The meeting between her and Johnny was very affecting. After a few words Mamie noticed that her swell Johnny wore no neck-tie. Johnny, seemingly embarrassed, turned to a Court policeman, and asked him to lend him his tie for a short time. The policeman declined, but remarked that Mamie had a tie that would match Johnny's complexion very well. Mamie impulsively took off her tie, put it on Johnny, kissed him, and left the Court-house.

Johnny was to be tried in ten minutes, but

*Mamie and the Negotiable Bonds.*

he induced his lawyer to have the trial put off for half an hour ; and another case was tried instead. Then he took off Mamie's neck-tie, tore the back out of it, and removed two fine steel saws. He gave one to Patsy, and in a few minutes they had penetrated a small iron bar which closed a little window leading to an alley. Patsy was too large to squeeze himself through the opening, but "stalled" for Johnny while the latter "made his gets". When they came to put these two on trial there was a sensation in Court. No Johnny! Patsy knew nothing about it, he said ; and he received six years for his crime.

But Johnny's day for a time in the "stir" soon came around. He made a good "touch", and got away with the goods, but was betrayed by a pal, a professional thief who was in the pay of the police, technically called a "stool-pigeon". Mamie visited Johnny in the Tombs, and when she found the case was hopeless she wanted to go and steal something herself so that she might accompany her boy to prison. But when Johnny told her there were no women at Sing Sing she gave up the idea. Johnny went to prison for four years, and Mamie went to a tattooer, and, as a

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

proof of her devotion, had Johnny's name indelibly stamped upon her arm.

Mamie, in consequence of her fidelity to Johnny, whom she regularly visited at Sing Sing, was a heroine and a martyr in the eyes of the grafters of both sexes. The money she and Johnny had saved began to dwindle, and soon she was compelled to work again at box-making. She remained faithful to Johnny, although many a good grafter tried to make up to the pretty girl. When Johnny was released from Sing Sing, Mamie was even happier than he. They had no money now, but some politicians and saloon-keepers who knew that Johnny was a good money-getter, set them up in a little house. And they resumed their quiet domestic life together.

Their happiness did not last long, however. Johnny needed money more than ever now and resumed his dangerous business. He got in with a quartette of the cleverest safe-crackers in the country, and made a tour of the Eastern cities. They made many important touches, but finally Johnny was again under suspicion for a daring robbery in Union Square, and was compelled to become a solitary fugitive. He sent word, through an old-

*Mamie and the Negotiable Bonds.*

time burglar, to Mamie, exhorted her to keep up the home, and promised to send money regularly. He was forced, however, to stay away from New York for several years, and did not dare to communicate with Mamie.

At first, Mamie tried to resume her work at box-making. But she had had so much leisure and had lived so well that she found the work irksome and the pay inadequate. Mamie knew many women pickpockets and shop-lifters, friends of her husband. When some of these adventurous girls saw that Mamie was discontented with her lot, they induced her to go out and work with them. So Mamie became a very clever shop-lifter, and, for a time, made considerable money. Then many of the best "guns" in the city again tried to make up to Mamie, and marry her. Johnny was not on the spot, and that, in the eyes of a thief, constitutes a divorce. But Mamie still loved her wayward boy and held the others back.

In the meantime Johnny had become a great traveller. He knew that the detectives were so hot on his track that he dared to stay nowhere very long; nor dared to trust anyone: so he worked alone. He made a num-

## *The Autobiography of a Thief.*

ber of daring robberies, all along the line from Montreal to Detroit, but they all paled in comparison with a touch he made at Philadelphia, a robbery which is famous in criminal annals.

He had returned to Philadelphia, hoping to get a chance to send word to Mamie, whom he had not seen for years, and for whom he pined. While in the city of brotherly love he was "tipped off" to a good thing. He boldly entered a large mercantile house, and, in thirteen minutes, he opened a time-lock vault, and abstracted three hundred thousand dollars worth of negotiable bonds and escaped.

The bold deed made a sensation all over the country. The mercantile house and the safe manufacturers were so hot for the thief that the detectives everywhere worked hard and "on the level". Johnny was not suspected then, and never "did time" for this touch. For a while he hid in Philadelphia; boarded there with a poor, respectable family, representing himself as a laborer out of work. He spent the daytime in a little German beer saloon, playing pinocle with the proprietor; and was perfectly safe.

*Mamie and the Negotiable Bonds.*

But his longing for Mamie had grown so strong that he could not bear it. He knew that the detectives were still looking for him because of the old crime, and that they were hot to discover the thief of the negotiable bonds. He sent word to Mamie, nevertheless, through an old pal he found at Philadelphia, and arranged to see her at Mount Vernon, near New York.

The two met in the side room of a little saloon near the railway station; and the greeting was affectionate in the extreme. They had not seen one another for years! And hardly a message had been exchanged. After a little Johnny told Mamie, proudly, that it was he who had stolen the negotiable bonds.

"Now," he added, "we are rich. After a little I can sell these bonds for thirty cents on the dollar and then you and I will go away and give up this life. I am getting older and my nerve is not what it was once. We'll settle down quietly in London or some town where we are not known, and be happy. Won't we, dear?"

Mamie said "Yes," but she appeared confused. When Johnny asked her what was

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

the matter, she burst into tears; and choked and sobbed for some time before she could say a word. She ordered a glass of whiskey, which she never used to drink in the old days, and when the bar-tender had left, she turned to the worried Johnny, embraced him tenderly and said, in a voice which still trembled:

"Johnny, will you forgive me if I tell you something? It's pretty bad, but not so bad as it might be, for I love only you."

Johnny encouraged her with a kiss and she continued, in a broken voice:

"When you were gone again, Johnny, I tried to make my living at the old box-making work; but the pay wasn't big enough for me then. So I began to graft—dipping and shop-lifting—and made money. But a Central Office man you used to know—Jim Lennon—got on to me."

"Jim Lennon,?" said Johnny, "Sure, I knew him. He used to be sweet on you, Mamie. He treated you right, I hope."

Mamie blushed and looked down.

"Well?" said Johnny.

"Jim came to me one day," she continued, "and told me he wouldn't stand for what I was doing. He said the drygoods people



*Mamie and the Negotiable Bonds.*

were hollering like mad ; and that he'd have to arrest me if I didn't quit. I tried to square him with a little dough, but I soon saw that wasn't what he was after."

" 'Look here, Mamie,' he finally said. 'It's just this way. Johnny is a good fellow, but he's dead to you and dead to me. He's done time, and that breaks all marriage ties. Now, I want you to hitch up with me, and lead an honest life. I'll give you a good home, and you won't run any more risk of the pen !' "

Johnny grew very pale as Mamie said the last words ; and when she stopped speaking, he said quietly :

"And you did it ?"

Mamie again burst into tears. "Oh, Johnny," she cried, "what else could I do. He wouldn't let me go on grafting, and I had to live."

"And so you married him ?" Johnny insisted.

The reply was in a whisper.

"Yes," she said.

For the next thirty seconds Johnny thought very rapidly. This woman had his liberty in her hands. He had told her about the negotiable bonds. Besides, he loved Mamie and understood the difficulty of her position. His

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

life as a thief had made him very tolerant in some respects. He therefore swallowed his emotion, and turned a kind face to Mamie.

"You still love me?" he asked, "better than the copper?"

"Sure," said Mamie, warmly.

"Now listen," said Johnny, the old business-like expression coming back into his face. "I am hounded for the old trick; and the detectives are looking everywhere for these negotiable bonds, which I have here, in this satchel. Can I trust you with them? Will you mind them for me, until things quiet down?"

"Of course, I will," said Mamie, gladly.

So they parted once more. Johnny went into hiding again, and Mamie went to the detective's house, with the negotiable bonds. She had no intention of betraying Johnny; for she might be arrested for receiving stolen goods; and, besides, she still loved her first husband. So she planted the bonds in the bottom of the detective's trunk.

Here was a pretty situation. Her husband, the detectives, and many other "fly-cops" all over the country, were looking for these negotiable bonds, at the very moment when they

*Mamie and the Negotiable Bonds.*

were safely stowed away in the detective's trunk. Mamie and Johnny, who continued to meet occasionally, often smiled at the humor of the situation.

Soon, however, suspicion for the Philadelphia touch began to attach to Johnny. Mamie's detective asked her one evening if she had heard anything about Johnny, of late.

"Not for years," said Mamie, calmly.

But one night, several Central Office men followed Mamie as she went to Mt. Vernon to meet Johnny; and when the two old lovers parted, Johnny was arrested on account of the fifteen thousand dollar robbery in Brooklyn, from the penalty of which he had escaped by means of Mamie's neck-tie many years before. The detectives suspected Johnny of having stolen the bonds, but of this they could get no evidence. So he was sent to Sing Sing for six years on the old charge. When he was safely in prison the detectives induced him to return the bonds, on the promise that he would not be prosecuted at his release, and would be paid a certain sum of money. The mercantile house agreed, and Johnny sent word to Mamie to give up the bonds. Then, of course, the detective knew about the trick that Mamie

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

had played him. But he, like Johnny, was a philosopher, and forgave the clever woman. When he first heard of it, however, he had said to her, indignantly :

“You cow, if you had given the bonds to me, I would have been made a police captain, and you my queen.”

As soon as Johnny got out of stir, Mamie quit the detective, and the couple are now living again together in a quiet, domestic manner, in Manhattan.

## CHAPTER VI.

### *What The Burglar Faces.*

FOR a long time I took Sheenie Annie's advice and did not do any night work. It is too dangerous, the come-back is too sure, you have to depend too much on the nerve of your pals, the "bits" are too long ; and it is very difficult to square it. But as time went on I grew bolder. I wanted to do something new, and get more dough. My new departure was not, however, entirely due to ambition and the boldness acquired by habitual success. After a gun has grafted for a long time his nervous system becomes affected, for it is certainly an exciting life. He is then very apt to need a stimulant. He is usually addicted to either opium or chloral, morphine or whiskey. Even at this early period I began to take a little opium, which afterwards was one of the main causes of my constant residence in stir, and was really the wreck of my life, for when a grafter is doped he is inclined to be very reckless. Perhaps if I had never hit the hop

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

I would not have engaged in the dangerous occupation of a burglar.

I will say one thing for opium, however. That drug never makes a man careless of his personal appearance. He will go to prison frequently, but he will always have a good front, and will remain a self-respecting thief. The whiskey dip, on the other hand, is apt to dress carelessly, lose his ambition and, eventually to go down and out as a common "bum".

I began night-work when I was about twenty years old, and at first I did not go in for it very heavily. Big Jack, Jerry, Ed and I made several good touches in Mt. Vernon and in hotels at summer resorts and got sums ranging from two hundred to twenty-seven hundred dollars. We worked together for nearly a year with much success and only an occasional fall, and these we succeeded in squaring. Once we had a shooting-match which made me a little leary. I was getting out the window with my swag, when a shot just grazed my eye. I nearly decided to quit then, but, I suppose because it was about that time I was beginning to take opium, I continued with more boldness than ever.

One night Ed, a close pal of mine, was oper-

*What The Burglar Faces.*

ating with me out in Jersey. We were working in the rear of a house and Ed was just shinning up the back porch to climb in the second story window, when a shutter above was thrown open and, without warning, a pistol shot rang out.

Down came Ed, falling like a log at my feet.

"Are you hurt?," said I.

"Done!" said he, and I saw it was so.

Now a man may be nervy enough, but self-preservation is the first rule of life. I turned and ran at the top of my speed across two back yards, then through a field, then over a fence into what seemed a ploughed field beyond. The ground was rough and covered with hummocks, and as I stumbled along I suddenly tripped and fell ten feet down into an open grave. The place was a cemetery, though I had not recognized it in the darkness. For hours I lay there trembling, but nobody came and I was safe. It was not long after that, however, that something did happen to shake my nerve, which was pretty good. It came about in the following way.

A jeweler, who was a well-known "fence", put us on to a place where we could get thousands. He was one of the most successful

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

"feelers-out" in the business. The man who was my pal on this occasion, Dal, looked the place over with me and though we thought it a bit risky, the size of the graft attracted us. We had to climb up on the front porch, with an electric light streaming right down on us.

I had reached the porch when I got the well-known signal of danger. I hurriedly descended and asked Dal what was the matter.

"Jim," he said, "there's somebody off there, a block away."

We investigated, and you can imagine how I felt when we found nothing but an old goat. It was a case of Dal's nerves, but the best of us get nervous at times.

I went to the porch again and opened the window with a putty knife (made of the rib of a woman's corset), when I got the "cluck" again, and hastily descended, but again found it was Dal's imagination.

Then I grew hot, and said: "You have knocked all the nerve out of me, for sure."

"Jim," he replied, "I ain't feeling good."

Was it a premonition? He wanted to quit the job, but I wouldn't let him. I opened up on him. "What!" I said. "You are willing to steal one piece of jewelry and take your



*What The Burglar Faces.*

chance of going to stir, but when we get a good thing that would land us in Easy Street the rest of our lives, you weaken ! ”

Dal was quiet, and his face unusually pale. He was a good fellow, but his nerve was gone. I braced him up, however, and told him we'd get the “*éclat*” the third time, sure. Then climbing the porch the third time, I removed my shoes, raised the window again, and had just struck a light when a revolver was pressed on my head. I knocked the man's hand up, quick, and jumped. As I did so I heard a cry and then the beating of a policeman's stick on the sidewalk.

I ran, with two men after me, and came to the gateway of a yard, where I saw a big bloodhound chained to his kennel. He growled savagely, but it was neck or nothing, so I patted his head just as though I were not shaking with fear, slipped down on my hands and knees and crept into his dog-house. Why didn't he bite me ? Was it sympathy ? When my pursuers came up, the owner of the house, who had been aroused by the cries, said : “ He is not here. This dog would eat him up.” When the police saw the animal they were convinced of it too.

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

A little while later I left my friend's kennel. It was four o'clock in the morning and I had no shoes on and only one dollar and sixty cents in my pocket. I sneaked through the back window of the first house I saw, stole a pair of shoes and eighty dollars from a room where a man and his wife were sleeping. Then I took a car. Knowing that I was still being looked for, I wanted to get rid of my hat, as a partial disguise. On the seat with me was a working man asleep. I took his old soft hat, leaving my new derby by his side, and also took his dinner pail. Then when I left the car I threw away my collar and necktie, and reached New York, disguised as a workingman. The next day the papers told how poor old Dal had been arrested. Everything that had happened for weeks was put on him.

A week later Dal was found dead in his cell, and I believe he did the Dutch act (suicide), for I remember one day, months before that fatal night, Dal and I were sitting in a politician's saloon, when he said to me :

"Jim, do you believe in heaven?"

"No," said I.

"Do you believe in hell?" he asked.

*What The Burglar Faces.*

"No," said I.

"I've got a mind to find out," he said quickly, and pointed a big revolver at his teeth. One of the guns in the saloon said: "Let him try it," but I knocked the pistol away, for something in his manner made me think seriously he would shoot.

"You poor brute," I said to him. "I'll put your ashes in an urn some day and write "Dear Old Saturday Night" for an epitaph for you; but it isn't time yet."

It did not take many experiences like the above to make me very leary of night-work; and I went more slowly for some time. I continued to dip, however, more boldly than ever and to do a good deal of day work; in which comparatively humble graft the servant girls, as I have already said, used to help us out considerably. This class of women never interested me as much as the sporting characters, but we used to make good use of them; and sometimes they amused us.

I remember an entertaining episode which took place while Harry, a pal of mine at the time, and I, were going with a couple of these hard-working Molls. Harry was rather inclined to be a sure-thing grafter, of which class of thieves

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

I shall say more in another chapter ; and after my recent dangerous adventures I tolerated that class more than was customary with me. Indeed, if Harry had been the real thing I would have cut him dead ; as it was he came near enough to the genuine article to make me despise him in my ordinary mood. But, as I say, I was uncommonly leary just at that time.

He and I were walking in Stuyvesant Square when we met a couple of these domestic slaves. With a "hello," we rang in on them, walked them down Second Avenue and had a few drinks all around. My girl told me whom she was working with. Thinking there might be something doing I felt her out further, with a view to finding where in the house the stuff lay. Knowing the Celtic character thoroughly, I easily got the desired information. We took the girls into Bonnell's Museum, at Eighth Street and Broadway, and saw a howling border melodrama, in which wild Indians were as thick as Moll-buzzers in 1884. Mary Anne, who was my girl, said she should tell her mistress about the beautiful play ; and asked for a program. They were all out, and so I gave her an old one, of another play,

*What The Burglar Faces.*

which I had in my pocket. We had a good time, and made a date with them for another meeting, in two weeks from that night; but before the appointed hour we had beat Mary Anne's mistress out of two hundred dollars worth of silverware, easily obtained, thanks to the information I had received from Mary Anne. When we met the girls again, I found Mary Anne in a great state of indignation; I was afraid she was "next" to our being the burglars, and came near falling through the floor. But her rage, it seemed, was about the play. She had told her mistress about the wild Indian melodrama she had seen, and then had shown her the program of *The Banker's Daughter*.

"But there is no such thing as an Indian in *The Banker's Daughter*," her mistress had said. "I fear you are deceiving me, Mary Anne, and that you have been to some low place on the Bowery."

The other servants in the house got next and kidded Mary Anne almost to death about Indians and *The Banker's Daughter*. After I had quieted her somewhat she told me about the burglary that had taken place at her house, and Harry and I were much interested. She

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

was sure the touch had been made by two "naygers" who lived in the vicinity.

It was shortly after this incident that I beat Blackwell's Island out of three months. A certain "heeler" put me on to a disorderly house where we could get some stones. I had everything "fixed." The "heeler" had arranged it with the copper on the beat, and it seemed like a sure thing; although the Madam, I understood, was a good shot and had plenty of nerve. My accomplice, the heeler, was a sure thing grafter, who had selected me because I had the requisite nerve and was no squealer. At two o'clock in the morning a trusted pal and I ascended from the back porch to the Madam's bed-room. I had just struck a match, when I heard a female voice say, "What are you doing there?" and a bottle, fired at my head, banged up against the wall with a crash. I did not like to alarm women, and so I made my "gets" out the window, over the fence, and into another street, where I was picked up by a copper, on general principles.

The Madam told him that the thief was over six feet tall and had a fierce black mustache. As I am only five feet seven inches and was smoothly shaven, it did not seem like

an identification ; although when she saw me she changed her note, and swore I was the man. The copper, who knew I was a grafter, though he did not think I did that kind of work, nevertheless took me to the station-house, where I convinced two wardmen that I had been arrested unjustly. When I was led before the magistrate in the morning, the copper said the lady's description did not tally with the short, red-haired and freckled thief before his Honor. The policemen all agreed, however, that I was a notorious grafter, and the magistrate, who was not much of a lawyer, sent me to the Island for three months on general principles.

I was terribly sore, for I knew I had been illegally treated. I felt as much a martyr as if I had not been guilty in the least ; and I determined to escape at all hazards ; although my friends told me I would be released any day ; for certainly the evidence against me had been insufficient.

After I had been on the Island ten days I went to a friend, who had been confined there several months and said : " Eddy, I have been unjustly convicted for a crime I committed—such was my way of putting it—and

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

I am determined to make my elegant, (escape) come what will. Do you know the weak spots of this dump?"

He put me "next", and I saw there was a chance, a slim one, if a man could swim and didn't mind drowning. I found another pal, Jack Donovan, who, like me, could swim like a fish; he was desperate too, and willing to take any chance to see New York. Five or six of us slept together in one large cell, and on the night selected for our attempt, Jack and I slipped into a compartment where about twenty short term prisoners were kept. Our departure from the other cell, from which it was very difficult to escape after once being locked in for the night, was not noticed by the night guard and his trusty because our pals in the cell answered to our names when they were called. It was comparatively easy to escape from the large room where the short term men were confined. Into this room, too, Jack and I had taken tools from the quarry during the daytime.

It was twelve o'clock on a November night when we made our escape. We took ropes from the canvas cot, tied them together, and lowered ourselves to the ground on the out-



## *What The Burglar Faces.*

side, where we found bad weather, rain and hail. We were unable to obtain a boat, but secured a telegraph pole, rolled it into the water, and set off with it for New York. The terrific tide at Hellgate soon carried us well into the middle of Long Island Sound, and when we had been in the water half an hour, we were very cold and numb, and began to think that all was over. But neither of us feared death. All I wanted was to save enough money to be cremated; and I was confident my friends would see to that. I don't think fear of death is a common trait among grafters. Perhaps it is lack of imagination; more likely, however, it is because they think they won't be any the worse off after death.

Still, I was not sorry when a wrecking boat suddenly popped our way. The tug did not see us, and hit Jack's end of the pole a hard blow that must have shaken him off. I heard him holler "Save me," and I yelled too. I didn't think anything about capture just then. All my desire to live came back to me.

I was pulled into the boat. The captain was a good fellow. He was "next" and only smiled at my lies. What was more to the purpose he gave me some good whiskey,

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

and set me ashore in Jersey City. Jack was drowned. All through life I have been used to losing a friend suddenly by the wayside; but I have always felt sad when it happened. And yet it would have been far better for me if I had been picked out for an early death. I guess poor Jack was lucky.

Certainly there are worse things than death. Through these three years of continual and for the most part successful graft, I had known a man named Henry Fry whose story is one of the saddest. If he had been called off suddenly as Jack was, he would certainly have been deemed lucky by those who knew; for he was married to a bad woman. He was one of the most successful box-men (safe-blowers) in the city, and made thousands, but nothing was enough for his wife. She used to say, when he would put twelve hundred dollars in her lap, "This won't meet expenses. I need one thousand dollars more." She was unfaithful to him, too, and with his friends. When I go to a *matinée* and see a lot of sleek, fat, inane looking women, I wonder who the poor devils are who are having their life blood sucked out of them. Certainly it was so with Henry, or Henny, as we used to call him.

*What The Burglar Faces.*

One day, I remember, we went down the Sound with a well-known politician's chowder party, and Henny was with us. Two weeks earlier New York had been startled by a daring burglary. A large silk-importer's place of business was entered and his safe, supposed to be burglar-proof, was opened. He was about to be married, and his valuable wedding presents, which were in the safe, and six thousand dollars worth of silk, were stolen. It was Henny and his pals who had made the touch, but on this beautiful night on the Sound, Henny was sad. We were sitting on deck, as it was a hot summer night, when Henny jumped off his camp-stool and asked me to sing a song. I sang a sentimental ditty, in my tenor voice, and then Henny took me to the side of the boat, away from the others.

"Kid," he said, "I feel trouble coming over me."

"Cheer up," I replied. "You're a little down-hearted, that's all."

"I wish to God," he said, "I was like you."

I pulled out a five dollar bill and a two dollar bill and remarked: "I've got just seven dollars to my name."

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

He turned to me and said :

"But you are happy. You don't let anything bother you."

Henny did not drink as a rule; that was one reason he was such a good box-man, but on this occasion we had a couple of drinks, and I sang "I love but one." Then Henny ordered champagne, grew confidential, and told me his troubles.

"Kid" he said, "I've got thirty five hundred dollars on me. I have been giving my wife a good deal of money, but don't know what she does with it. In sixty days I have given her three thousand dollars, and she complains about poverty all the time."

Henny had a nice flat of seven or eight rooms; he owed nothing and had no children. He said he was unable to find any bank books in his wife's trunk, and was confident she was not laying the money by. She did not give it to her people, but even borrowed money from her father, a well-to-do builder.

Two days after the night of the excursion, one of Henny's pals in the silk robbery, went into a gin mill, treated everybody, and threw a one thousand dollar bill down on the bar.

Grafters, probably more than others, like this kind of display. It is the only way to rise in their society. A Central Office detective saw this little exhibition, got into the grafter's confidence and weeded him out a bit. A night or two afterwards Henny was in bed at home, when the servant girl, who was in love with Henny, and detested his wife because she treated her husband so badly (she used to say to me, "She ain't worthy to tie his shoe string") came to the door and told Henny and his wife that a couple of men and a policeman in uniform were inquiring for him. Henny replied sleepily that they were friends of his who had come to buy some stones; but the girl was alarmed. She knew that Henny was crooked and feared that those below meant him no good. She took the canvas turn-about containing burglar's tools which hung on the wall near the bed, and pinned it around her waist, under her skirt, and then admitted the three visitors.

The sergeant said to Henny, who had dressed himself, "You are under suspicion for the silk robbery." Yet there was, as is not uncommon, a "but", which is as a rule a monetary consideration. Henny knew that the crime was old,

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

and, as he thought his "fence" was safe, he did not see how there could be a come-back. So he did not take the hint to shell out, and worked the innocent con. But those whose business it is to watch the world of prey, put two and two together, and were "next" that Henny and his mob had pulled off the trick. So they searched the house, expecting to find, if not *éclat*, at least burglar's tools; for they knew that Henny was at the top of the ladder, and that he must have something to work with. While the sergeant was going through Henny's trunk, one of the flymen fooled with the pretty servant girl. She jumped, and a pair of turners fell on the floor. It did not take the flyman long to find the whole kit of tools. Henny was arrested, convicted, and sent to Sing Sing for five years. While in prison he became insane, his delusion being that he was a funny man on the Detroit Free Press, which he thought was owned by his wife.

I never discovered what Henny's wife did with the money she had from him. When I last heard of her she was married to another successful grafter, whom she was making unhappy also. In a grafter's life a woman often takes the part of the avenger of society.

*What The Burglar Faces.*

She turns against the grafters their own weapons, and uses them with more skill, for no man can graft like a woman.

I had now been grafting for three years in the full tide of success. Since the age of eighteen I had had no serious fall. I had made much money and lived high. I had risen in the world of graft, and I had become, not only a skillful pickpocket, but a good swindler and drag-worker and had done some good things as a burglar. I was approaching my twenty-first year, when, as you will see, I was to go to the penitentiary for the first time. This is a good place, perhaps, to describe my general manner of life, my daily menu, so to speak, during these three fat years: for after my first term in state's prison things went from bad to worse.

I lived in a furnished room; or at a hotel. If there was nothing doing in the line of graft, I'd lie abed late, and read the newspapers to see if any large gathering, where we might make some touches, was on hand. One of my girls, of whom there was a long succession, was usually with me. We would breakfast, if the day was an idle one, about one or two o'clock

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

in the afternoon. Then we'd send to the restaurant and have a beefsteak or chops in our rooms, and perhaps a whiskey sour. If it was another grafter's girl I'd won I'd be greatly pleased, for that kind of thing is a game with us. In the afternoon I'd take in some variety show; or buy the "Tommy" a present; if it was summer we might go to a picnic, or to the Island. If I was alone, I would meet a pal, play billiards or pool, bet on the races, baseball and prize fights, jump out to the Polo grounds, or go to Patsy's house and have a game of poker. Patsy's wife was a handsome grafter; and Patsy was jealous. Every gun is sensitive about his wife, for he doesn't know how long he will have her with him. In the evening I would go to a dance-hall; or to Coney Island if the weather was good.

If it was a busy day, that is, if there was a touch to be pulled off, we would get up in the morning or the afternoon, according to the best time for the particular job in hand. In the afternoon we would often graft at the Polo grounds, where we had a copper "right." We did not have the same privileges at the race track, because it was protected by the Pinkerton men. We'd console ourselves at



*What The Burglar Faces.*

the Polo grounds, which we used to tear wide open, and where I never got even a hint of a fall; the coppers got their percentage of the touches. In the morning we would meet at one of the grafter's homes or rooms and talk over our scheme for the day or night. If we were going outside the city we would have to rise very early. Sometimes we were sorry we had lost our sleep; particularly the time we tried to tear open the town of Sing Sing, near which the famous prison is. We found nothing to steal there but pig iron, and there were only two pretty girls in the whole village. We used to jump out to neighboring towns, not always to graft, but sometimes to see our girls, for like sailors, the well-dressed, dapper pickpocket has a girl in every port. If we made a good touch in the afternoon we'd go on a spree in the evening with Sheenie Annie, Blonde Mamie, Big Lena or some other good-natured lasses, or we'd go over and inspect the Jersey maidens. After a good touch we would put some of the dough away for fall-money, or for our sick relatives or guns in stir or in the hospital. We'd all chip in to help out a woman grafter in trouble, and pool a piece of jewelry sometimes, for the purpose.

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

Then, our duty done, we would put on our best front, and visit our friends and sporting places. Among others we used to jump over to a hotel kept by an ex-gun, one of the best of the spud men (green goods men), who is now on the level and a bit of a politician. He owns six fast horses, is married and has two beautiful children.

A few months before I was sent to the penitentiary for the first time, I had my only true love affair. I have liked many girls, but sentiment of the kind I felt for Ethel has played little part in my life. For Ethel I felt the real thing, and she for me. She was a good, sensible girl, and came from a respectable family. She lived with her father, who was a drummer, and took care of the house for him. She was a good deal of a musician, and, like most other girls, she was fond of dancing. I first met her at Beethoven Hall, and was introduced to her by a man, an honest laborer, who was in love with her. I liked her at first sight, but did not love her until I had talked with her. In two weeks we were lovers, and went everywhere together. The workingman who loved her too was jealous and began to knock me. He told her I was a grafter, but

*What The Burglar Faces.*

she would not believe him ; and said nothing to me about it, but it came to my ears through an intimate girl pal of hers. Shortly after that I fell for a breech-kick (was arrested for picking a man's trouser's pocket), but I had a good lawyer and the copper was one of those who are open to reason. I lay a month in the Tombs, however, before I got off, and Ethel learned all about it. She came to the Tombs to see me, but, instead of reproaches, I got sympathy from her. After I was released I gave her some of my confidence. She asked me if I wouldn't be honest, and go to work ; and said she would ask her father to get me a job. Her father came to me and painted what my life would be, if I kept on. I thought the matter over sincerely. I had formed expensive habits which I could not keep up on any salary I could honestly make. Away down in my mind (I suppose you would call it soul) I knew I was not ready for reform. I talked with Ethel, and told her that I loved her, but that I could not quit my life. She said she would marry me anyway. But I thought the world of her, and told her that though I had blasted my own life I would not blast hers. I would not marry her, she was

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

so good and affectionate. When we parted, I said to myself : Man proposes, habit disposes.

It was certainly lucky that I did not marry that sweet girl, for a month after I had split with her, I fell for a long term in state's prison. It was for a breech-kick, which I could not square. I had gone out of my hotel one morning for a bottle of whiskey when I met two grafters, Johnny and Alec, who were towing a "sucker" along with them. They gave me the tip that it was worth trying. Indeed, I gathered that the man must have his bank with him, and I nicked him in a car for his breech-leather. A spectator saw the deed and tipped off a copper. I was nailed, but had nothing on me, for I had passed the leather to Alec. I was not in the mood for the police station, and with Alec's help I "licked" the copper, who pulled his gun and fired at us as we ran up a side street. Alec blazed back, and escaped, but I was arrested. I could not square it, as I have said, for I had been wanted at Headquarters for some time past, because I did not like to give up, and was no stool-pigeon. I notified Mr. R——, who was told to keep his hands off. I had been tearing the cars open for so long that

*What The Burglar Faces.*

the company wanted to "do" me. They got brassy-mouthed and yelled murder. I saw I had a corporation against me and hadn't a living chance to beat it. So I pleaded guilty and received five years and seven months at Sing Sing.

A boy of twenty-one, I was hand-cuffed with two old jail-birds, and as we rode up on a Fourth Avenue car to the Grand Central Station, I felt deeply humiliated for the first time in my life. When the passengers stared at me I hung my head with shame.

## CHAPTER VII.

### *In Stir.*

I HUNG my head with shame, but not because of contrition. I was ashamed of being caught and made a spectacle of. All the way to Sing Sing station people stared at us as if we were wild animals. We walked from the town to the prison, in close company with two deputy sheriffs. I observed considerably, knowing that I should not see the outside world again for a number of years. I looked with envy at the people we passed who seemed honest, and thought of home and the chances I had thrown away.

When I reached the stir I was put through the usual ceremonies. My pedigree was taken, but I told the examiners nothing. I gave them a false name and a false pedigree. Then a bath was given to my clothes and I was taken to the tailor shop. When my hair had been cropped close and a suit of stripes given me I felt what it was to be the convicted criminal. It was not a pleasant feeling, I can

tell you, and when I was taken to my cell my heart sank indeed. A narrow room, seven feet, four inches long; dark, damp, with moisture on the walls, and an old iron cot with plenty of company, as I afterwards discovered—this was to be my home for years. And I as full of life as a young goat! How could I bear it?

After I had been examined by the doctor and questioned about my religion by the chaplain, I was left to reflect in my cell. I was interrupted in my melancholy train of thought by two convicts who were at work in the hall just outside my cell. I had known them on the outside, and they, taking good care not to be seen by the screws (keepers) tipped me off through my prison door to everything in stir which was necessary for a first timer to know. They told me to keep my mouth shut, to take everything from the screws in silence, and if assigned to a shop to do my work. They told me who the stool-pigeons were, that is to say, the convicts who, in order to curry favor and have an easy time, put the keepers next to what other convicts are doing, and so help to prevent escapes. They tipped me off to those keepers who were hard to get along

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

with, and put me next to the Underground Tunnel, and who were running it. Sing Sing, they said, is the best of the three New York penitentiaries: for the grub is better than at the others, there are more privileges, and, above all, it is nearer New York, so that your friends can visit you more frequently. They gave me a good deal of prison gossip, and told me who among my friends were there, and what their condition of health was. So and so had died or gone home, they said, such and such had been drafted to Auburn or Clinton prisons. If I wanted to communicate with my friends in stir all that was necessary for me to do was to write a few stiffes (letters) and they would be sent by the Underground Tunnel. They asked me about their old pals, hang-outs and girls in New York, and I, in turn gave them a lot of New York gossip. Like all convicts they shed a part of the things they had received from home, gave me canned goods, tobacco and a pipe. It did not take me long to get on to the workings of the prison.

I was particularly interested in the Underground Tunnel, for I saw at once its great usefulness. This is the secret system by



which contraband articles, such as whiskey, opium and morphine are brought into the prison. When a rogue is persuasive with the coin of the realm he can always find a keeper or two to bring him what he considers the necessities of life, among which are opium, whiskey and tobacco. If you have a screw "right," you can be well supplied with these little things. To get him "right" it is often necessary to give him a share—about twenty per cent—of the money sent you from home. This system is worked in all the State prisons in New York, and during my first term, or any of the other terms for that matter, I had no difficulty in supplying my growing need for opium.

I do not want people to get the idea that it is always necessary to bribe a keeper, in order to obtain these little luxuries; for many a screw has brought me whiskey and hop, and contraband letters from other inmates, without demanding a penny. A keeper is a human being like the rest of us, and he is sometimes moved by considerations other than of pelf. No matter how good and conscientious he may be, a keeper is but a man after all, and, having very little to do, especially if he is in

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

charge of an idle gang of "cons" he is apt to enter into conversation with them, particularly if they are better educated or more interesting than he, which often is the case. They tell him about their escapades on the outside and often get his sympathy and friendship. It is only natural that those keepers who are good fellows should do small favors for certain convicts. They may begin by bringing the convicts newspapers to read, but they will end by providing them with almost everything. Some of them, however, are so lacking in human sympathy, that their kindness is aroused only by a glimpse of the coin of the realm; or by the prospect of getting some convict to do their dirty work for them, that is, to spy upon their fellow prisoners.

At Auburn penitentiary, whither I was drafted after nine months at Sing Sing, a few of the convicts peddled opium and whiskey, with, of course, the connivance of the keepers. There are always some persons in prison as well as out who want to make capital out of the misfortunes of others. These peddlars, were despised by the rest of the convicts, for they were invariably stool-pigeons; and young convicts who never before knew the power of

the drug became opium fiends, all on account of the business propensities of these detestable rats (stool-pigeons) who, because they had money and kept the screws next to those cons who tried to escape, lived in Easy Street while in stir.

While on this subject, I will tell about a certain famous "fence" (at one of these prisons) although he did not operate until my second term. At that time things were booming on the outside. The graft was so good that certain convicts in my clique were getting good dough sent them by their pals who were at liberty; and many luxuries came in, therefore, by the Underground Tunnel. Now those keepers who are next to the Underground develop, through their association with convicts, a propensity to graft, but usually have not the nerve to hustle for the goods. So they are willing to accept stolen property, not having the courage and skill to steal, from the inhabitants of the under world. A convict, whom I knew when at liberty, named Mike, thought he saw an opportunity to do a good "fencing" business in prison. He gave a "red-front" (gold watch and chain), which he had stolen in his good days, to a

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

certain keeper who was running the Underground, and thus got him "right." Then Mike made arrangements with two grafters on the outside to supply the keeper and his friends with what they wanted. If the keeper said his girl wanted a stone, Mike would send word to one of the thieves on the outside to supply a good diamond as quickly as possible. The keeper would give Mike a fair price for these valuable articles and then sell the stones or watches, or make his girl a present.

Other keepers followed suit, for they couldn't see how there was any "come-back " possible, and soon Mike was doing a thriving business. It lasted for five or six months, when Mike stopped it as a regular graft because of the growing cupidity of the keepers. One of them ordered a woman's watch and chain and a pair of diamond ear-rings through the Underground Tunnel. Mike obtained the required articles, but the keeper paid only half of what he promised, and Mike thereupon shut up shop. Occasionally, however, he continued to sell goods stolen by his pals who were at liberty, but only for cash on the spot, and refused all credit. The keepers gradually got a great feeling of respect for this convict

“fence” who was so clever and who stood up for his rights; and the business went on smoothly again, for a while.

But finally it was broken up for good. A grafter on the outside, Tommy, sent through the Underground a pawn ticket for some valuable goods, among them a sealskin sacque worth three hundred dollars, which he had stolen and hocked in Philadelphia. Mike sold the pawn-ticket to a screw. Soon after that Tommy, or one of his pals, got a fall and “squealed”. The police got “next” to where the goods were, and when the keeper sent the ticket and the money to redeem the articles they allowed them to be forwarded to the prison, but arrested the keeper for receiving stolen goods. He was convicted and sentenced to ten years, but got off through influence. That, however, finished the “fence” at the institution.

To resume the thread of my narrative, the day after I reached Sing Sing I was put through the routine that lasted all the time I was there. At six-thirty in the morning we were awakened by the bell and marched in lock-step (from which many of us were to acquire a peculiar gait that was to mark us through life and help

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

prevent us from leading decent lives) to the bucket-shop, where we washed, marched to the mess for breakfast at seven-thirty, then to the various shops to work until eleven-thirty, when at the whistle we would form again into squads and march, again in the lock-step, fraternally but silently, to our solemn dinner, which we ate in dead silence. Silence, indeed, except on the sly, was the general rule of our day, until work was over, when we could whisper together until five o'clock, the hour to return to our cells, into which we would carry bread for supper, coffee being conveyed to us through a spout in the wall. The food at Sing Sing was pretty good. Breakfast consisted of hash or molasses, black coffee and bread; and at dinner we had pork and beans, potatoes, hot coffee and bread. Pork and beans gave place to four eggs on Friday, and sometimes stews were given us. It was true what I'd heard, that Sing Sing has the best food of any institution I have known. After five o'clock I would read in my cell by an oil lamp (since my time electricity has been put in the prison) until nine o'clock, when I had to put out my light and go to bed.

I had a great deal more time for reading

and meditation in my lonely cell than one would think by the above routine. I was put to work in the shop making chairs. It was the first time I had ever worked in my life, and I took my time about it. I felt no strong desire to work for the State. I was expected to cane a hundred chairs a day, but I usually caned about two. I did not believe in work. I felt at that time that New York State owed me a living. I was getting a living all right, but I was ungrateful. I did not thank them a wee bit. I must have been a bad example to other "cons," for they began to get as tired as myself. At any rate, I lost my job, and was sent back to my cell, where I stayed most of the time while at Sing Sing.

I worked, indeed, very little at any time during my three bits in the penitentiary. The prison at Sing Sing, during the nine months I was there on my first term, was very crowded, and there was not enough work to go round; and I was absolutely idle most of the time. When I had been drafted to Auburn I found more work to do, but still very little, for it was just then that the legislature had shut down on contract labor in the prisons. The outside merchants squealed because they could

## *The Autobiography of a Thief.*

not compete with unpaid convict labor ; and so the prison authorities had to shut down many of their shops, running only enough to supply the inside demand, which was slight. For eighteen months at Auburn I did not work a day. I think it was a very bad thing for the health of convicts when this law was passed ; for certainly idleness is a very bad thing for most of them ; and to be shut up nearly all the time in damp, unhealthy cells like those at Sing Sing, is a terrible strain on the human system.

Personally, however, I liked to be in my cell, especially during my first year of solitary confinement, before my health began to give way ; for I had my books from the good prison libraries, my pipe or cigarettes, and last, but not least, I had a certain portion of opium that I used every day.

For me, prison life had one great advantage. It broke down my health and confirmed me for many years in the opium habit, as we shall see ; but I educated myself while in stir. Previous to going to Sing Sing my education had been almost entirely in the line of graft ; but in stir, I read the English classics and became familiar with philosophy and the science of



medicine and learned something about chemistry.

One of my favorite authors was Voltaire, whom I read, of course, in a translation. His "Dictionary" was contraband in prison but I read it with profit. Voltaire was certainly one of the shrewdest of men, and as up to snuff as any cynical grafter I know, and yet he had a great love for humanity. He was the philosopher of humanity. Goethe said that Luther threw the world back two hundred years, but I deny it; for Luther, like Voltaire, pointed out the ignorance and wickedness of the priests of their day. These churchmen did not understand the teachings of Christ. Was Voltaire delusional? The priests must have thought so, but they were no judges, for they were far worse and less humane than the French revolutionists. The latter killed outright, but the priests tortured in the name of the Most Humane. I never approved of the methods of the French revolutionists, but certainly they were gentle in comparison with the priests of the Spanish Inquisition.

I think that, in variety of subjects, Voltaire has no equal among writers. Shrewd as he was, he had a soul, and his moral courage was

grand. His defense of young Barry, who was arrested for using language against the church, showed his kindness and breadth of mind. On his arrival in Paris, when he was only a stripling, he denounced the cowardly, fawning sycophants who surrounded Louis XIV,\* and wrote a sarcastic poem on His Nibs, and was confined in the Bastille for two years. His courage, his wit, his sarcasms, his hatred of his persecutors, and his love and kindness, stamp him as one of the great, healthy intellects of mankind. What a clever book is *Candide*! What satire! What wit! As I lay on my cot how often I laughed at his caustic comments on humanity! And how he could hate! I never yet met a man of any account who was not a good hater. I own that Voltaire was ungallant toward the fair sex. But that was his only fault.

I enjoyed Victor Hugo because he could create a great character, and was capable of writing a story with a plot. I rank him as a master of fiction, although I preferred his experience as a traveller, to his novels, which are not real enough. Ernest Renan was a bracing and clever writer, but I was sadly dis-

\**Sic.* (Editor's Note.)

appointed in reading his *Life of Jesus*. I expected to get a true outline of Christ's time and a character sketch of the man himself, but I didn't. I went to the fountain for a glass of good wine, but got only red lemonade.

I liked Dumas, and revelled in the series beginning with *The Three Musketeers*. I could not read Dumas now, however. I also enjoyed Gaboriau and Du Boisgobey, for they are very sensational; but that was during my first term in stir. I could not turn a page of their books now, for they would seem idiotic to me. Balzac is a bird of another feather. In my opinion he was one of the best dissectors of human nature that the world ever produced. Not even Shakespeare was his equal. His depth in searching for motives, his discernment in detecting a hypocrite, his skill in showing up women, with their follies, their loves, their little hypocrisies, their endearments, their malice and their envy is unrivalled. It is right that Balzac should show woman with all her faults and follies and virtues, for if she did not possess all these characteristics, how could man adore her?

In his line I think Thackeray is as great as Balzac. When I had read *Vanity Fair*, *Penden-*

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

*nis*, *The Newcomes* and *Barry Lyndon*, I was so much interested that I read anything of his I could lay my hands on, over and over again. With a novel of Thackeray's in my hand I would become oblivious to my surroundings, and long to know something of this writer's personality. I think I formed his mental make-up correctly, for I imagined him to be gentle and humane. Any man with ability and brains equal to his could not be otherwise. What a character is Becky Sharp! In her way she was as clever a grafter as Sheenie Annie. She did not love Rawdon as a good wife should. If she had she would not be the interesting Becky that she is. She was grateful to Rawdon for three reasons ; first, he married her ; second, he gave her a glimpse into a station in life her soul longed for ; third, he came from a good family, and was a soldier and tall, and it is well-known that little women like big men. Then Rawdon amused Becky. She often grinned at his lack of brains. She grinned at everything, and when we learn that Becky got religion at the end of the book, instead of saying, God bless her, we only grin, too.

*Pendennis* is a healthy book. I always

sympathize with Pen and Laura in their struggles to get on, and when the baby was born I was willing to become Godpapa, just for its Mamma's sake. *The Newcomes* I call Thackeray's masterpiece. It is truer to life than any other book I ever read. Take the scene where young Clive throws the glass of wine in his cousin's face. The honest horror of the father, his indignation when old Captain Costigan uses bad language, his exit when he hears a song in the Music Hall—all this is true realism. But the scene that makes this book Thackeray's masterpiece is that where the old Colonel is dying. The touching devotion of Madam and Ethel, the love for old Tom, his last word "*adsum*," the quiet weeping of his nurse, and the last duties to the dead; the beautiful tenderness of the two women, of a kind that makes the fair sex respected by all men—I can never forget this scene till my dying day.

When I was sick in stir a better tonic than the quack could prescribe was Thackeray's *Book of Snobs*. Many is the night I could not sleep until I had read this book with a relish. It acted on me like a bottle of good wine, leaving me peaceful after a time of

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

pleasure. In this book are shown up the little egotisms of the goslings and the foibles of the sucklings in a masterly manner.

I read every word Dickens ever wrote ; and I often ruminated in my mind as to which of his works is the masterpiece. *Our Mutual Friend* is weak in the love scenes, but the book is made readable by two characters, Noddy Boffin and Silas Wegg. Where Wegg reads, as he thinks, *The Last of the Russians*, when the book was *The Decline and Fall Off the Roman Empire*, there is the quintessence of humor. Silas's wooden leg and his occupation of selling eggs would make anybody smile, even a dip who had fallen and had no money to square it.

The greatest character in *David Copperfield* is Uriah Heep. The prison scene where this humble hypocrite showed he knew his Bible thoroughly, and knew the advantage of having some holy quotations pat, reminded me often of men I have known in Auburn and Sing Sing prisons. Some hypocritical jail-bird would dream that he could succeed on the outside by becoming a Sunday School superintendent ; and four of the meanest thieves I ever knew got their start in that

way. Who has not enjoyed Micawber, with his frothy personality and straitened circumstances, and the unctious Barkis.—Poor Emily! Who could blame her? What woman could help liking Steerforth? It is strange and true that good women are won by men they know to be rascals. Is it the contrast between Good and Evil, or is it because the ne'er-do-well has a stronger character and more magnetic force? Agnes was one of the best women in the world. Contrast her with David's first wife. Agnes was like a fine violin, while Dora was like a wailing hurdy-gurdy.

*Oliver Twist* is Dickens's strongest book. He goes deeper into human nature there than in any other of his writings. Fagin, the Jew, is a very strong character, but overdrawn. The picture of Fagin's dens and of the people in them, is true to life. I have seen similar gatherings many a time. The ramblings of the Artful Dodger are drawn from the real thing, but I never met in real life such a brutal character as Bill Sykes; and I have met some tough grafters, as the course of this book will show. Nancy Sykes, however, is true to life. In her degradation she was still

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

a woman. I contend that a woman is never so low but a man was the cause. One passage in the book has often touched me, as it showed that Nancy had not lost her sex. When she and Bill were passing the prison, she turned towards it and said: "Bill, they were fine fellows that died to-day." "Shut your mouth," said Bill. Now I don't think there is a thief in the United States who would have answered Nancy's remark that way. Strong arm workers who would beat your brains out for a few dollars would be moved by that touch of pity in Nancy's voice.

But Oliver himself is the great character, and his story reminds me of my own. The touching incident in the work-house where his poor stomach is not full, and he asks for a second platter of mush to the horror of the teachers, is not overdrawn. When I was in one of our penal institutions, at a later time of my life, I was ill, and asked for extra food; but my request was looked upon as the audacity of a hardened villain. I had many such opportunities to think of Oliver.

I always liked those authors who wrote as near life as decency would permit. Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* has often amused me, and



*Tom Jones*, *Roderick Random* and *Peregrine Pickle* I have read over and over again. I don't see why good people object to such books. Some people are forever looking after the affairs of others and neglecting their own; especially a man whom I will call Common Socks who has put himself up as a mentor for over seventy millions of people. Let me tell the busy ladies who are afraid that such books will harm the morals of young persons that the more they are cried down the more they will be read. For that matter they ought to be read. Why object to the girl of sixteen reading such books and not to the woman of thirty-five? I think their mental strength is about equal. Both are romantic and the woman of thirty-five will fall in love as quickly as the girl of sixteen. I think a woman is always a girl; at least, it has been so in my experience. One day I was grafting in Philadelphia. It was raining, and a woman was walking along on Walnut Street. She slipped on the wet sidewalk and fell. I ran to her assistance, and saw that her figure was slim and girlish and that she had a round, rosy face, but that her hair was pure white. When I asked her if she was hurt, she said "yes," but

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

when I said "Let me be your grandson and support you on my way," I put my foot into it, for, horrors! the look she gave me, as she said in an icy voice, "I was never married!" I wondered what manner of men there were in Philadelphia, and, to square myself, I said: "Never married! and with a pair of such pretty ankles!" Then she gave me a look, thanked me, and walked away as jauntily as she ever did in her life, though she must have been suffering agonies from her sprained ankle. Since that time I have been convinced that they of the gentle sex are girls from fifteen to eighty.

I read much of Lever, too, while I was in stir. His pictures of Ireland and of the noisy strife in Parliament, the description of Dublin with its spendthrifts and excited populace, the gamblers and the ruined but gay young gentlemen, all mixed up with the grandeur of Ireland, are the work of a master. I could only compare this epoch of worn-out regalia with a St. Patrick's day parade twenty years ago in the fourth ward of Manhattan.

Other books I read in stir were Gibbon's *Roman Empire*, Carlyle's *Frederick the Great*, and many of the English poets. I read

Wordsworth, Gray and Goldsmith, but I liked Tom Moore and Robert Burns better. The greatest of all the poets, however, in my estimation, is Byron. His loves were many, his adventures daring, and his language was as broad and independent as his mind.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### *In Stir (continued).*

SING SING was overflowing with convicts, and after I had been there nine months, I and a number of others were transferred to Auburn penitentiary. There I found the cells drier, and better than at Sing Sing, but the food not so good. The warden was not liked by the majority of the men, but I admired him for two things. He believed in giving us good bread; and he did not give a continental what came into the prison, whether it was a needle or a cannister, as long as it was kept in the cell and not used.

It was in Auburn stir that opium grew to be a habit with me. I used to give the keepers who were running the Underground one dollar of every five that were sent me, and they appreciated my kindness and kept me supplied with the drug. What part the hop began to play in my life may be seen from the routine of my days at Auburn; particularly at those periods when there was no work to be done.

After rising in the morning I would clean out my cell, and turn up my bed and blankets; then I went to breakfast, then if there was no work to do, back to my cell, where I ate a small portion of opium, and sometimes read the daily paper, which was also contraband. It is only the stool-pigeons, those convicts who have money, or the cleverest among the rascals, who get many of these privileges. After I had had my opium and the newspaper I would exercise with dumb-bells and think or read in my cell. Then I would have a plunge bath and a nap, which would take me up to dinner time. After dinner I would read in my cell again until three o'clock, when I would go to the bucket-shop or exercise for half an hour in the yard, in lock step, with the others; then back to the cell, taking with me bread and a cup of coffee made out of burnt bread crust, for my supper. In the evening I would read and smoke until my light went out, and would wind up the day with a large piece of opium, which grew larger, as time passed.

For a long time I was fairly content with what was practically solitary confinement. I had my books, my pipe, cigarettes and my regular supply of hop. Whether I worked in

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

the daytime or not I would usually spend my evenings in the same way. I would lie on my cot and sometimes a thought like the following would come to me: "Yes, I have stripes on. When I am released perhaps some one will pity me, particularly the women. They may despise and avoid me, most likely they will. But I don't care. All I want is to get their wad of money. In the meantime I have my opium and my thoughts and am just as happy as the millionaire, unless he has a narcotic."

After the drug had begun to work I would frequently fall into a deep sleep and not wake until one or two o'clock the following morning; then I would turn on my light, peer through my cell door, and try to see through the little window out in the corridor. A peculiar nervousness often came over me at this hour, particularly if the weather had been rainy, and my imagination would run on a ship-wreck very often, or on some other painful subject; and I might tell the story to myself in jingles, or jot it down on a piece of paper. Then my whole being would be quiet. A gentle, soothing melancholy would steal upon me. Often my imagination was so power-

fully affected that I could really see the events of my dream. I could see the ship tossing about on waves mountain high. Then and only then I was positive I had a soul. I was in such a state of peace that I could not bear that any human being should suffer. At first the scenes before my imagination would be most harrowing, with great loss of life, but when one of the gentle sex appeared vividly before me a shudder passed over me, and I would seek consolation in jingles such as the following :

A gallant bark set sail one day  
For a port beyond the sea,  
The Captain had taken his fair young bride  
To bear him company.  
This little brown lass  
Was of Puritan stock.  
Her eyes were the brightest e'er seen.  
They never came back ;  
The ship it was wrecked  
In a storm in the old Gulf Stream.

Two years had passed, then a letter came  
To a maid in a New England town.  
It began Darling Kate, it ended Your Jack,  
I am alive in a foreign land.  
The Captain, his gentle young wife and your own  
Were saved by that hand unseen,

## *The Autobiography of a Thief.*

But the rest—they went down  
In that terrible storm  
That night in the old Gulf Stream.

But these pleasures would soon leave me, and I would grow very restless. My only resource was another piece of opium. Sometimes I awoke much excited, paced my cell rapidly and felt like tearing down the door. Sometimes a book would quiet me. The best soother I had was the most beautiful poem in the English language—Walt Whitman's *Ode To Death*. When I read this poem, I often imagined I was at the North Pole, and that strange shapes in the clouds beckoned me to come to them. I used to forget myself, and read aloud and was entirely oblivious to my surroundings, until I was brought to myself by the night guard shouting, "What in—is the matter with you?"

After getting excited in this way I usually needed another dose of hop. I have noticed that the difference between opium and alcohol is that the latter is a disintegrator and tears apart, while the opium is a subtle underminer. Opium, for a long time anyway, stimulates the intelligence; while the reverse is true of alcohol. It was under the influence of opium



that I began to read philosophy. I read Hume and Locke, and partly understood them, I think, though I did not know that Locke is pronounced in only one syllable till many years after I had read and re-read parts of *The Human Understanding*. It was not only the opium, but my experience on the outside, that made me eager for philosophy and the deeper poetry; for a grafter's wits, if they don't get away from him altogether, become keen through his business, since he lives by them. It was philosophy, and the spectacle of men going suddenly and violently insane all about me, that led me first to think of self-control, though I did not muster enough to throw off the opium habit till many years afterwards. I began to think of will-power about this time, and I knew it was an acquired virtue, like truth and honesty. I think, from a moral standpoint, that I lived as good a life in prison as anybody on the outside, for at least I tried to overcome myself. It was life or death, or, a thousand times worse, an insane asylum. Opium led me to books besides those on philosophy, which eventually helped to cure me. At this time I was reading Balzac, Shakespeare, Huxley, Tyndall and Lav-

ater. One poem of Shakespeare's touched me more than any other poem I ever read—*The Rape of Lucrece*. It was reading such as this that gave me a broader view, and I began to think that this was a terrible life I was leading. But, as the reader will see, I did not know what hell was until several years later.

I had been in stir about four years on my first bit when I began to appreciate how terrible a master I had come under. Of course, to a certain extent, the habit had been forced upon me. After a man has had for several years bad food, little air and exercise, no natural companionship, particularly with the other sex, from whom he is entirely cut off, he really needs a stimulant. Many men fall into the vilest of habits. I found, for my part, that only opium would calm me. It takes only a certain length of time for almost all convicts to become broken in health, addicted to one form or another of stimulant which in the long run pulls them down completely. Diseases of various kinds, insanity and death, are the result. But before the criminal is thus released, he grows desperate in the extreme; particularly if he resorts to opium, for that drug makes one reckless. The hop fiend never

takes consequences into consideration. Under its influence I became very irritable and unruly, and would take no back talk from the keepers. They and the stool-pigeons began to be afraid of me. I would not let them pound me in any way, and I often got into a violent fight.

As long as I had my regular allowance of opium, which in the fourth year of my term was about twenty grains a day, I was peaceable enough. It was when I began to lessen the amount, with the desire to give it up, that I became so irritable and violent. The strain of reform, even in this early and unsuccessful attempt, was terrible. At times I used to go without the full amount for several days; but then I would relapse and go on a debauch until I was almost unconscious. After recovery, I would make another resolution, only to fall again.

But my life in stir was not all that of the solitary; there were means, even when I was in the shop, of communicating with my fellow convicts; generally by notes, as talking was forbidden. Notes, too, were contraband, but we found means of sending them through cons working in the hall. Sometimes good-natured

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

or avaricious keepers would carry them ; but as a rule a convict did not like to trust a note to a keeper. He was afraid that the screw would read it, whereas it was a point of honor with a convict to deliver the note unread. The contents of these notes were usually news about our girls or pals, which we had received through visitors—rare, indeed!—or letters. By the same means there was much betting done on the races, baseball games and prize fights. We could send money, too, or opium, in the same way, to a friend in need ; and we never required an I. O. U.

We were allowed to receive visitors from the outside once every two months ; also a box could be delivered to us at the same intervals of time. My friends, especially my mother and Ethel, sent me things regularly, and came to see me. They used to send me soap, tooth brushes and many other delicacies, for even a tooth brush is a delicacy in prison. Ethel stuck to me for three years and visited me regularly during that period. Then her visits ceased, and I heard that she had married. I couldn't blame her, but I felt bad about it all the same.

But my mother came as often as the two

*In Stir.*

months rolled by ; not only during this first term, but during all my bits in stir. Certainly she has stuck to me through thick and thin. She has been my only true friend. If she had fallen away from me, I couldn't have blamed her ; she would only have gone with the rest of the world ; but she didn't. She was good not only to me, but to my friends, and she had pity for everybody in stir. I remember how she used to talk about the rut worn in the stone pavement at Sing Sing, where the men paced up and down. "Talk about the Bridge of Sighs !" she used to say.

When a man is in stir he begins to see what an ungrateful brute he has been ; and he begins to separate true friends from false ones. He thinks of the mother he neglected for supposed friends of both sexes, who are perhaps friendly at the beginning of his sentence, but soon desert him if he have a number of years to serve. Long after all others have ceased coming to see him, his old mother, bowed and sad, will trudge up the walk from the station to visit her thoughtless and erring son ! She carries on her arm a heavy basket of delicacies for the son who is detested by all good citizens, and in her heart there is still

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

hope for her boy. She has waited many years and she will continue to wait. What memories come to the mother as she sees the mansion of woes on the Hudson looming up before her! Her son is again a baby in her imagination; or a young fellow, before he began to tread the rocky path!—They soon part, for half an hour is all that is given, but they will remember forever the mother's kiss, the son's good-bye, the last choking words of love and familiar advice, as she says: "Trust in God, my lad."

After one of my mother's visits I used to have more sympathy for my fellow convicts. I was always a keen observer, and in the shops or at mess time, and when we were exercising together in lock step, or working about the yard or in the halls, I used to "feel out" my brother "cons", often with a kindly motive. I grew very expert in telling when a friend was becoming insane; for imprisonment leads to insanity, as everybody knows. Many a time a man I knew in stir would grow nervous or absent-minded, then suspicious, and finally would be sent to the madhouse at Dannemora or Matteawan.

For instance, take a friend of mine named

Billy. He was doing a bit of ten years. In the fifth year of his sentence I noticed that he was brooding, and I asked him what was the matter.

"I am afraid," he said, "that my wife is going outside of me."

"You are not positive, are you?" I asked.

"Well," he answered, "she visited me the other day, and she was looking good (prosperous). My son was with her, and he looked good, too. She gave me five dollars and some delicacies. But she never had five dollars when I was on the outside."

"She's working," said I, trying to calm him.

"No; she has got a father and mother," he replied, "and she is living with them."

"Billy," I continued, "how long have you been in stir?"

"Growing on six years," he said.

"Billy," I proceeded, "what would you do if you were on the outside and she was in prison for six years?"

"Well," he replied, "I'd have to give myself some rope."

"Philosophers claim that it is just as hard for a woman to live alone as for a man," I

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

said. "You're unreasonable, Billy. Surely you can't blame her."

Billy's case is an instance of how, when a convict has had bad food, bad air and an unnatural routine for some time, he begins to borrow trouble. He grows anæmic and then is on the road to insanity. If he has a wife he almost always grows suspicious of her, though he does not speak about it until he has been a certain number of years in prison. It was not long after the above conversation took place that Billy was sent to the insane asylum at Matteawan.

Sometimes, after a man has begun to grow insane, he will show it by reticence, rather than by talkativeness, according to his disposition. One of my intimate friends, in stir much longer than I, was like a ray of sunshine, witty and a good story teller. His laugh was contagious and we all liked to see him. He was one of the best night prowlers (burglars) in the profession, and had many other gifts. After he had been in stir, however, for a few years, he grew reticent and suspicious, thought that everybody was a stool-pigeon, and died a raving maniac a few years later at Matteawan.



Sometimes a convict will grow so nervous that he will attempt to escape, even when there is no chance, or will sham insanity. An acquaintance of mine, Louis, who had often grafted with me when we were on the outside, told me one day he did not expect to live his bit out. When confined a man generally thinks a lot about his condition, reads a book on medicine and imagines he has every disease the book describes. Louis was in this state, and he consulted me and two others as to whether he ought not to "shoot a bug" (sham insanity); and so get transferred to the hospital. One advised him to attack a keeper and demand his baby back. But as Billy had big, black eyes and a cadaverous face, I told him he'd better shoot the melancholy bug; for he could do that better. Accordingly in the morning when the men were to go to work in the stone yard, Billy appeared in the natural (naked). He had been stalled off by two friends until he had reached the yard. There the keepers saw him, and as they liked him, they gently took him to the hospital. He was pronounced incurably insane by two experts, and transferred to the madhouse. The change of air was so beneficial that Louis speedily re-

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

covered his senses. At least, the doctors thought so when he was discovered trying to make his elegant (escape); and he was sent back to stir.

As a rule, however, those who attempted to sham insanity failed. They were usually lacking in originality. At any hour of the day or night the whole prison might be aroused by some convict breaking up house, as it was called when a man tried to shoot the bug. He might break everything in his cell, and yell so loud that the other convicts in the cells near by would join in and make a horrible din. Some would curse, and some laugh or howl. If it was at night and they had been awakened out of an opium sleep, they would damn him a thousand miles deep. His friends, however, who knew that he was acting, would plug his game along by talking about his insanity in the presence of stool-pigeons. These latter would tell the keepers that he was buggy (insane), and, if there was not a blow, he might be sent to the hospital. Before that happened, however, he had generally demolished all his furniture. The guards would go to his cell, and chain him up in the Catholic chapel until he could be examined by the doctor. War-

den Sage was a humane man, and used to go to the chapel himself and try to quiet the fake lunatic, and give him dainties from his own table. During the night the fake had historic company, for painted on the walls were, on one side of him, Jesus, and on the other, Judas and Mary Magdalene.

A favorite method of shooting the bug, and a rather difficult one for the doctors to detect, was that of hearing voices in one's cell. This is more dangerous for the convict than for anybody else, for when a fake tries to imagine he hears voices, he usually begins to really believe he does, and then from a fake he becomes a genuine freak. Another common fake is to tell the keeper that you have a snake in your arm, and then take a knife and try to cut it out; but it requires nerve to carry this fake through. Sometimes the man who wants to make the prison hospital merely fakes ordinary illness. If he has a screw or a doctor "right" he may stay for months in the comparatively healthy hospital at Sing Sing, where he can loaf all day, and get better food than at the public mess. It is as a rule only the experienced guns who are clever enough to work these little games.

## *The Autobiography of a Thief.*

For faking, conversing, loafing in the shop, and for many other forbidden things, we were often punished, though the screws as often winked at small misdemeanors. At Sing Sing they used to hang us up by the wrists sometimes until we fainted. Auburn had a jail, now used as the condemned cells, where there was no bed and no light. In this place the man to be punished would remain from four to ten days and live on ten ounces of bread and half a jug of water a day. In addition, the jail was very damp, worse even than the cells at Sing Sing, where I knew many convicts who contracted consumption of the lungs and various kidney complaints.

Indeed, a great deal of dying goes on in State's prison. During my first term it seemed as if three niggers died to every white man. A dozen of us working around the front would comment on the "stiffs" when they were carried out. One would ask, "Who's dead?" The reply might be, "Only a nigger." One day I was talking in the front with a hall-room man when a stiff was put in the wagon. "Who's dead?" I asked. The hall-man wanted to bet it was a nigger. I bet him a dollar it was a white man, and then asked the hospital

nurse, who said it was not a nigger, but an old pal of mine, named Jerry Donovan. I felt sore and would not accept the money I had won. Poor Jerry and I did house-work together for three months, some of which I have told of, and he was a good fellow, and a sure and reliable grafter. And now he had "gone up the escape," and was being carried to the little graveyard on the side of the hill where only an iron tag would mark his place of repose.

My intelligence was naturally good, and when I began to get some education I felt myself superior to many of my companions in stir. I was not alone in this feeling, for in prison there are many social cliques; though fewer than on the outside. Men who have been high up and have held responsible positions when at liberty make friends in stir with men they formerly would not have trusted as their boot-blacks. The professional thieves usually keep together as much as possible in prison, or communicate together by means of notes; though sometimes they associate with men who, not professional grafters, have been sent up for committing some big forgery, or other big swindle. The reason for this is

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

business; for the gun generally has friends among the politicians, and he wants to associate while in stir only with others who have influence. It is the guns who are usually trusted by the screws in charge of the Underground Tunnel, for the professional thief is less likely to squeal than the novice. Therefore, the big forger who has stolen thousands, and may be a man of ability and education appreciates the friendship of the professional pickpocket who can do him little favors, such as railroading his mail through the Underground, and providing him with newspapers, or a bottle of booze.

The pull of the professional thief with outside politicians often procures him the respect and consideration of the keepers. One day a convict, named Ed White, was chinning with an Irish screw, an old man who had a family to support. Jokes in stir lead to friendship, and when the keeper told Ed that he was looking for a job for his daughter, who was a stenographer, Ed said he thought he could place her in a good position. The old screw laughed and said; "You loafer, if you were made to carry a hod you wouldn't be a splitting matches in stir." But Ed meant what he

had said, and wrote to the famous Tammany politician, Mr. Wet Coin, who gave the girl a position as stenographer at a salary of fourteen dollars a week. The old screw took his daughter to New York, and when he returned to Auburn he began to "Mister" Ed. "I c'lare to God," he said, "I don't know what to make out of you. Here you are eating rotten hash, cooped up like a wild animal, with stripes, when you might be making twelve to fifteen dollars a week." Ed replied, sarcastically, "That would about keep me in cigar money."

One of the biggest men I knew in stir was Jim A. McBlank, at one time chief of police and Mayor of Coney Island. He was sent to Sing Sing for his repeating methods at election, at which game he was A No. 1. He got so many repeaters down to the island that they were compelled to register as living under fences, in dog kennels, tents, or any old place. There was much excitement in the prison when the Lord of Coney Island was shown around the stir by Principal Keeper Connoughton. He was a good mechanic, and soon had a gang of men working under him; though he was the hardest worker of them all.

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

After he had been there awhile the riff-raff of of the prison, though they had never heard the saying that familiarity breeds contempt, dropped calling him Mr. McBlank, and saluted him as plain Jimmy. He was never in touch, however, with the majority of the convicts, for he was too close to the authorities ; and the men believe that convicts can not be on friendly terms with the powers that be unless they are stool-pigeons. Another thing that made the "cons" dislike the Mayor was the fact, that, when he was chief of police, he had settled a popular dip named Feeley for ten years and a half. The very worst thing against him, however, was his private refrigerator in which he kept butter, condensed milk and other luxuries, which he did not share with the other convicts. One day a young convict named Sammy, tried to beat Sing Sing. He bricked himself up in the wall, leaving a movable opening at the bottom. While waiting a chance to escape Sammy used to sally forth from his hiding-place and steal something good from McBlank's box. One night, while helping himself to the Mayor's delicacies, he thought he heard a keeper, and hastily plunging his arm into the refrigerator



he made away with a large piece of butter. What did the ex-Chief of police do but report the loss of his butter to the screws which put them next to the fact that the convict they had been looking for for nine nights was still in the stir. The next night they would have rung the "all-right" bell, and given up the search, and indeed, they rang the bell, but watched ; and when Sammy, thinking he could now go to New York, came out of his hiding place, he was caught. When the story circulated in the prison all kinds of vengeance were vowed against McBlank, who was much frightened. I heard him say that he would rather have lost his right arm than see the boy caught. What a come-down for a man who could throw his whole city for any state or national candidate at election time, to be compelled to apologize as McBlank was, to the lowest element in prison. Here indeed was the truth of that old saying : pride goeth before a fall.

One of the best liked of the convicts I met during my first bit was Ferdinand Ward, who got two years for wrecking the firm in which General Grant and his son were partners. He did many a kindness in stir to those who

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

were tough and had few friends. Another great favorite was Johnny Hope, son of Jimmy Hope, who stole three millions from the Manhattan Bank. The father got away, and Johnny, who was innocent, was nailed by a copper looking for a reputation, and settled for twenty years in Sing Sing, because he was his father's son and had the misfortune to meet an ambitious copper. When Johnny had been in prison about ten years, the inspector, who was the former copper, went to the Governor, and said he was convinced that the boy was innocent. But how about young Hope's wrecked life? Johnny's father, indeed, was a well-known grafter whom I met in Auburn, where we worked together for a while in the broom-shop. He was much older than I, and used to give me advice.

"Don't ever do a day's work in your life, my boy," he would say, "unless you can't help it. You are too intelligent to be a drudge."

Another common remark of his was: "Trust no convict," and a third was: "It is as easy to steal five thousand dollars as it is to steal five dollars."

Old man Hope had stolen millions and

ought to know what he was talking about. In personal appearance he was below the medium height, had light gray hair and as mild a pair of eyes as I ever saw in man or woman. I ranked him as a manly old fellow, and he was an idol among the small crooks, though he did not have much to do with them. He seemed to like to talk to me, partly because I never talked graft, and he detested such talk particularly among prison acquaintances. He referred one day to a pick pocket in stir who was always airing what he knew about the graft. "He's tiresome," said old Hope. "He is always talking shop."

One of the worst hated men at Auburn was Weeks, a well-known club man and banker, who once stole over a million dollars. He was despised by the other convicts, for he was a "squealer." One of the screws in charge of the Underground Tunnel was doing things for Weeks, who had a snap,—the position of book-keeper, in the clothing department. In his desk he kept whiskey, beer and cigars, and lived well. One day a big bug paid him a visit, and Weeks belched how he had to give up his watch and chain in order to secure luxuries. His friend, the big bug, reported to

## *The Autobiography of a Thief.*

the prison authorities, and the principal keeper went to Weeks and made the coward squeal on the keeper who had his "front." The screw lost his job, and when the convicts heard of it, they made Weeks' life miserable for years.

But the man who was hated worst of all those in prison was Biff Ellerson. I never understood why the other cons hated him, unless it was that he always wore a necktie ; this is not etiquette in stir, which in the convicts' opinion ought to be a place of mourning. He had been a broker and a clubman, and was high up in the world. Ellerson was a conscientious man, and once, when a mere boy, who had stolen a ten dollar watch, was given fifteen years, had publicly criticized the judge and raised a storm in the newspapers. Ellerson compared this lad's punishment with that of a man like Weeks, who had robbed orphans out of their all and only received ten years for it. Many is the time that this man, Biff Ellerson, has been kind to men in stir who hated him. He had charge of the dungeon at Auburn where convicts who had broken the rules were confined. I have known him to open my door and give me water on the quiet, many a time,

and he did it for others who were ungrateful, and at the risk, too, of never being trusted again by the screws and of getting a dose of the cuddy-hole himself.

By far the greater number of these swell grafters who steal millions die poor, for it is not what a man steals, but what he saves, that counts. I have often noticed that the bank burglar who is high up in his profession is not the one who has the most money when he gets to be forty-five or fifty years of age. The second or third class gun is more likely to lay by something. His general expenses are not so large and he does not need so much fall-money; and in a few years he can usually show more money than the big gun who has a dozen living on him. I knew a Big One who told me that every time he met a certain police official, his watch, a piece of jewelry, a diamond stud or even his cuff buttons were much admired. The policeman always had some relative or friend who desired just the kind of ornament the Big One happened to be wearing at the time.

I cannot help comparing those swell guys whom I knew at Sing Sing with a third class pickpocket I met on the same bit. The big ones

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

are dead or worse, but the other day I met, in New York, my old pickpocket friend in stir, Mr. Aut. I am positive that the hand-shake he gave me was only a muscular action, for Mr. Aut has "squared it", and the gun who has reformed and has become prosperous does not like to meet an old acquaintance, who knows too much about his past life. When I ran across him in the city I started in to talk about old times in stir and of pals we knew in the long ago, but he answered me by saying, "Nix", which meant "Drop It". To get him to talk I was forced to throw a few "Larrys" into him, such as: "Well, old man, only for your few mistakes of the past, you might be leader of Tammany Hall." Gradually he expanded and told me how much he had gained in weight since he left stir and what he had done for certain ungrateful grafters. He boasted that he could get bail for anyone to the sum of fifty thousand dollars, and he told the truth, for this man, who had been a third class dip, owns at the present time, three gin-mills and is something of a politician. He has three beautiful children and is well up in the world. His daughter was educated at a convent, and his son is at a well-known college.

Yet I remember the time when this ex gun,

Mr. Aut, and I, locked near one another in Sing Sing and consoled one another with what little luxuries we could get together. Our letters, booze and troubles were shared between us, and many is the time I have felt for him; for he had married a little shop girl and had two children at that time. When he got out of stir he started in to square it, that is, not to go to prison any more. He was wise and no one can blame him. He is a good father and a successful man. If he had been a better grafter it would not have been so easy for him to reform. I wish him all kinds of prosperity, but I don't like him as well as I did when we wore the striped garb and whispered good luck to one another in that mansion of woes on the Hudson.

One of Mr. Aut's possessions makes me smile whenever I think of it. In his swell parlor, over a brand new piano, hangs an oil painting of himself, in which he takes great pride. I could not help thinking that that picture showed a far more prosperous man and one in better surroundings than a certain photograph of his which is quite as highly treasured as the more costly painting; although it is only a tin-type, numbered two thousand and odd, in the Rogues' Gallery.

## CHAPTER IX.

### *In Stir and Out.*

SOME of the most disagreeable days I ever spent in prison were the holidays, only three of which during the year, however, were kept—Fourth of July, Thanksgiving and Christmas. In Sing Sing there was no work on those days, and we could lie abed longer in the morning. The food was somewhat better than usual. Breakfast consisted of boiled ham, mashed potatoes and gravy, and a cup of coffee with milk. After mess we went, as usual, to chapel, and then gave a kind of vaudeville show, all with local talent. We sang rag-time and sentimental songs, some of us played on an instrument, such as the violin, mandolin, or cornet, and the band gave the latest pieces from comic opera. After the show was over we went to the mess-room again where we received a pan containing a piece of pie, some cheese, a few apples, as much bread as we desired and—a real luxury in stir—two cigars. With our booty we then



returned to our cells, at about eleven o'clock in the morning, and after the guards had made the rounds to see that none of the birds had gone astray, we were locked up until the next morning, without anything more to eat. We were permitted to talk to one another from our cells until five o'clock, when the night guards went on duty. Such is—just imagine it—a great day in Sing Sing! The gun, no matter how big a guy he is, even if he has robbed a bank and stolen millions, is far worse off than the meanest laborer, be he ever so poor. He may have only a crust, but he has that priceless boon, his liberty.

At Auburn the routine on holidays is much the same as that of Sing Sing; but one is not compelled to go to chapel, which is a real kindness. I don't think a man ought to be forced to go to church, even in stir, against his will. On holidays in Auburn a man may stay in his cell instead of attending divine service, if he so desires, and not be punished for it. Many a con prefers not to go even to the vaudeville show, which at Auburn is given by outside talent, but remains quietly all day in his cell. There is one other great holiday privilege at Auburn, which some of the con-

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

victs appreciate more than I did. When the clock strikes twelve o'clock the convicts, locked in their cells, start in to make the rest of the night hideous, by pounding on the doors, playing all sorts of instruments, blowing whistles, and doing everything else that would make a noise. There is no more sleep that night, for everything is given over to Bedlam, until five thirty in the morning, when discipline again reigns, and the nervous man who detests these holidays sighs with pleasure, and says to himself: "I am so glad that at last everything is quiet in this cursed stir."

What with poor food, little air and exercise, no female society, bad habits and holidays, it is no wonder that there are many attempts, in spite of the danger, to escape from stir. Most of these attempts are unsuccessful, but a few succeed. One of the cleverest escapes I know of happened during my term at Auburn. B—— was the most feared convict in the prison. He was so intelligent, so reckless and so good a mechanic that the guards were afraid he would make his elegant any day. Indeed, if ever a man threw away gifts for not even the proverbial mess of pottage, it was this man B——. He was the cleverest man I

*In Stir and Out.*

ever met in stir or out. It was after one of the delightful holidays in Auburn that B——, who was a nervous man, decided to make his gets. He picked a quarrel with another convict and was so rough that the principal keeper almost decided to let him off; but when B—— spat in his face he changed his mind and put him in the dungeon. I have already mentioned this ram-shackle building at Auburn. It was the worst yet. All B——'s clothing was taken off and an old coat, shirt, and trousers without buttons were given him. An old piece of bay rope was handed him to tie around his waist, and he was left in darkness. This was what he wanted, for, although they had stripped him naked and searched him, he managed to conceal a saw, which he used to such good purpose that on the second night he had sawed himself into the yard. Instead of trying to go over the wall, as most cons would have done, B—— placed a ladder, which he found in the repair shop, against the wall, and when the guards discovered next morning that B—— was not in the dungeon, and saw the ladder on the wall, they thought he had escaped, and did not search the stir but notified the towns to look after him. He

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

was not found, of course, for he was hiding in the cellar of the prison. A night or two afterwards he went to the tailor shop, selected the best suit of clothes in the place, opened the safe which contained the valuables of the convicts, with a piece of steel and a hammer, thus robbing his fellow sufferers, and escaped by the ladder. After several months of freedom he was caught, sent back to stir, and forfeited half of his commutation time.

A more tragic attempt was made by the convicts, Big Benson and Little Kick. They got tools from friends in the machine shop and started in to saw around the locks of their doors. They worked quietly, and were not discovered. The reason is that there is sometimes honor among thieves. Two of their friends in their own gallery, two on the gallery above and two on that underneath, tipped them off, by a cough or some other noise, whenever the night guard was coming; and they would cease their work with the saws. Convicts grow very keen in detecting the screw by the creaking of his boots on the wooden gallery floor; if they are not quite sure it is he, they often put a small piece of looking-glass underneath the door, and can

*In Stir and Out.*

thus see down the gallery in either direction a certain distance. Whenever Benson and Kick were at work, they would accompany the noise of the saw with some other noise, so as to drown the former, for they knew that, although they had some friends among the convicts, there were others who, if they got next, would tip off the keepers that an escape was to be made. In the morning they would putty up the cuts made in the door during the night. One night when everything was ready, they slipped from their cells, put the mug on the guard, took away his cannister, and tied him to the bottom of one of their cells. They did the same to another guard, who was on the watch in the gallery below, went to the outside window on the Hudson side of Sing Sing, and putting a Jack, which they had concealed in the cell, between the bars of the window, spread them far apart, so that they could make their exit. At this point however they were discovered by a third guard, who fired at them, hitting Little Kick in the leg. The shot aroused the sergeant of the guards and he gave the alarm. Big Benson was just getting through the window when the whole pack of guards fired at him, killing him as dead as

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

a door-nail. Little Kick lost his nerve and surrendered, and was taken to the dungeon. Big Benson, who had been serving a term for highway robbery, was one of the best liked men in stir, and when rumors reached the convicts that he had been shot, pandemonium broke loose in the cells. They yelled and beat their coffee cups against the iron doors, and the officials were powerless to quiet them. There was more noise even than on a holiday at Auburn.

Soon after I was transferred from Sing Sing to Auburn, a friend came to me and said: "Jimmy, are you on either of the shoe-shop galleries? No? Well, if you can get on Keeper Riley's gallery I think you can spring (escape)."

Then he let me in on one of the cleverest beats I ever knew; if I could have succeeded in being put on that gallery I should not have finished my first term in State's prison. At that time work was slack and the men were locked in their cells most of the time. Leahy started in to dig out the bricks from the ceiling of his cell. Each day, when taking his turn for an hour in the yard, he would give the cement, which he had done up in small

packages, to friends, who would dump it in their buckets, the contents of which they would then throw into the large cesspool. While exercising in the yard, the cons would throw the bricks Leahy had removed on an old brick pile under the archway. After he had removed sufficient stuff to make a hole big enough to crawl through, all he had left to do was to saw a few boards, and remove a few tiles, and then he was on the roof. It is the habit of the guard, when he goes the rounds, to rap the ceiling of every cell with his stick, to see if there is an excavation. Leahy had guarded against this by filling a small box with sand and placing it in the opening. Then he pasted a piece of linen over the box and whitewashed it. Even when the screw came around to glance in his cell Leahy would continue to work, for he had rigged up a dummy of himself in bed. When he reached the roof, he dropped to a lower building, reached the wall which surrounds the prison, and with a rope lowered himself to the ground. With a brand new suit of clothes which a friend had stolen from the shop, Leahy went forth into the open, and was never caught.

At Sing Sing an old chum of mine named

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

Tom escaped, and would never have been caught if he had not been so sentimental. Indeed, he was improvident in every way. He had been a well-known house-worker, and made lots of money at this graft, but he lived well and blew what he stole, and consequently did many years in prison. He was nailed for a house that was touched of "éclat" worth thousands, and convicted, though of this particular crime he was, I am convinced, innocent; of course, he howled like a stuck pig about the injustice of it, all his life. While he was in Raymond Street jail he got wind of the men who really did the job. They were pals and he asked them to try to turn him out. His girl, Tessie, heard of it and wanted to go to Police Headquarters and squeal on the others, to save her sweetheart. But Tom was frantic, for there was no squeal in him. You find grafters like that sometimes, and Tom was always sentimental. He certainly preferred to go to stir rather than have the name of being a belcher. So he went to Sing Sing for seven and a half years. He was a good mechanic and was assigned to a brick-laying job on the wall. He had an easy time in stir, for he had a screw right, and got many



*In Stir and Out.*

luxuries through the Underground ; and was not watched very closely. One day he put a suit of clothes under his stripes, vamoosed into a wood near by, and removed his stripes. He kept on walking till he reached Connecticut, which, as I have said, is the softest state in the Union.

Tom would never have finished that bit in stir, if, as I have also said, he had not been so sentimental. When in prison a grafter continually thinks about his old pals and hang-outs, and the last scenes familiar to him before he went to stir. Tom was a well-known gun, with his picture in the Hall of Fame, and yet, after beating prison, and leaving years behind, and knowing that if caught he would have to do additional time, would have the authorities sore against him and be confined in the dark cell, he yet, in spite of all that, after a short time, made for his old haunts on the Bowery, where he was nailed by a fly-cop and sent back to Sing Sing. So much for the force of habit and of environment, especially when a grafter is a good fellow and loves his old pals.

On one occasion Tom was well paid for being a good fellow. Jack was a well-known

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

pugilist who had become a grafter. His wife's sister had married a millionaire, and Jack stole the millions, which amounted, in this case, to only one hundred thousand dollars. For this he was put in prison for four years. While in stir, Tom, who had a screw right, did him many favors, which Jack remembered. Years afterwards they were both on the outside again. Tom was still a grafter, but Jack had gone to work for a police official as general utility man, and gained the confidence of his employer, who was chief of the detective force. The latter got Jack a position as private detective in one of the swellest hotels in Florida. Now, Tom happened to be grafting in that State, and met his old friend Jack at the hotel. Instead of tipping off the chief that Tom was a grafter, Jack staked his old pal, for he remembered the favors he had received in stir. Tom was at liberty for four years, and then was brought to police headquarters where the chief said to him: "I know that you met Jack in Florida, and I am sore because he did not tip me off." Tom replied indignantly: "He is not a hyena like your ilk. He is not capable of the basest of all crimes, ingratitude. I can forgive a man

who puts his hand in my pocket and steals my money. I can forgive him, for it may do him good. He may invest the money and become an honored member of the community. But the crime no man can forgive is ingratitude. It is the most inhuman of crimes and only your ilk is capable of it."

The Chief smiled at Tom's sentiment—that was always his weak point—poor Tom!—and said: "Well, you are a clever thief, and I'm glad I was wise enough to catch you." Whereupon Tom sneered and remarked: "I could die of old age in this city for all of you and your detectives. I was tipped off to you by a Dicky Bird (stool pigeon) damn him!" I have known few grafters who had as much feeling as Tom.

More than five years passed, and the time for my release from Auburn drew near. The last weeks dragged terribly; they seemed almost as long as the years that had gone before. Sometimes I thought the time would never come. The day before I was discharged I bade good-bye to my friends, who said to me, smiling: "She has come at last," or "It's near at hand," or "It was a long time a-com-ing." That night I built many castles in the

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

air, with the help of a large piece of opium : and continued to make the good resolutions I had begun some time before. I had permission from the night guard to keep my light burning after the usual hour, and the last book I read on my first term in stir was *Tristram Shandy*. Just before I went to bed I sang for the last time a popular prison song which had been running in my head for months :

“ Roll round, '89, '90, '91, sweet '92 roll around.  
How happy I shall be the morning I go free, sweet '92  
roll around.”

Before I fell asleep I resolved to be good, to quit opium and not to graft any more. The resolution was easily made and I went to bed happy. I was up at day-break and penned a few last words to my friends and acquaintances remaining in stir. I promised some of them that I would see their friends on the outside and send them delicacies and a little money. They knew that I would keep my promise, for I have always been a man of my word ; as many of the most successful grafters are. It is only the vogel-grafter, the petty larceny thief or the “ sure-thing ” article, who habitually breaks his word. Many people

*In Stir and Out.*

think that a thief can not be trusted ; and it certainly is true that the profession does not help to make a man virtuous in his personal relations. But it is also true that a man may be, and sometimes is, honorable in his dealings with his own world, and at the same time a desperate criminal in the other. It is not of course common, to find a thief who is an honest man ; but is there very often an honest man anywhere, in the world of graft or out of it ? If it is often, so much the better, but that has not been my experience. Does not everyone know that the men who do society the greatest injury have never done time ; in fact, may never have broken any laws ? I am not trying to excuse myself or my companions in crime, but I think the world is a little twisted in its ideas as to right and wrong, and who are the greatest sinners.

When six o'clock on the final day came round it was a great relief. I went through the regular routine, and at eight o'clock was called to the front office, received a new suit of clothes, as well as my fare home and ten dollars with which to begin life afresh.

"Hold on," I said, to the Warden. "I worked eighteen months. Under the new

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

piece-price plan I ought to be allowed a certain percentage of my earnings."

The Warden, who was a good fellow and permitted almost anything to come in by the Underground Tunnel, asked the clerk if there was any more money for me. The clerk consulted with the keepers and then reported to the Warden that I was the most tired man that ever entered the prison; adding that it was very nervy of me to want more money, after they had treated me far better than the parent of the Prodigal treated his son. The Warden, thereupon, remarked to me that if I went pilfering again and were not more energetic than I had been in prison, I would never eat. "Goodbye," he concluded.

"Well," I said, "I hope we'll never meet again."

With my discharge papers in my hand, and in my mind a resolution never to go back to the stir where so many of my friends, strong fellows, too, had lost their lives or had become physical or mental wrecks, I left Auburn penitentiary and went forth into the free world. I had gone to stir a boy of twenty-one, and left it a man of twenty-six. I entered healthy, and left broken down in health, with the marks of the

## *In Stir and Out.*

jail-bird upon me ; marks, mental and physical, that would never leave me, and habits that I knew would stick closer than a brother. I knew that there was nothing in a life of crime. I had tested that well enough. But there were times during the last months I spent in my cell, when, in spite of my good resolutions, I hated the outside world which had forced me into a place that took away from my manhood and strength. I knew I had sinned against my fellow men, but I knew, too, that there had been something good in me. I was half Irish, and about that race there is naturally something roguish ; and that was part of my wickedness. When I left stir I knew I was not capable, after five years and some months of unnatural routine, of what I should have been by nature.

A man is like an electric plant. Use poor fuel and you will have poor electricity. The food is bad in prison. The cells at Sing Sing are a crime against the criminal ; and in these damp and narrow cells he spends, on the average, eighteen hours out of the twenty-four. In the name of humanity and science what can society expect from a man who has spent a number of years in such surroundings ? He

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

will come out of stir, as a rule, a burden on the tax-payers, unable to work, and confirmed in a life of crime; desperate, and willing to take any chance. The low-down, petty, canting thief, who works all the charitable societies and will rob only those who are his benefactors, or a door-mat, is utterly useless in prison or out. The healthy, intelligent, ambitious grafter is capable of reform and usefulness, if shown the error of his ways or taken hold of before his physical and mental health is ruined by prison life. You can appeal to his manhood at that early time. After he has spent a certain number of years in stir his teeth become decayed; he can not chew his food, which is coarse and ill-cooked; his stomach gets bad: and once his stomach becomes deranged it is only a short time before his head is in a like condition. Eventually, he may be transferred to the mad-house. I left Auburn stir a happy man, for the time, for I thought everything would be smooth sailing. As a matter of fact I could not know the actual realities I had to face, inside and outside of me, and so all my good resolutions were nothing but a dream.

It was a fine May morning that I left Auburn



*In Stir and Out.*

and I was greatly excited and bewildered by the brightness and joy of everything about me. I took my hat off, gazed up at the clear sky, looked up and down the street and at the passers-by, with a feeling of pleasure and confusion. I turned to the man who had been released with me, and said, "Let's go and get something to eat." On the way to the restaurant, however, the jangling of the trolleys upset my nerves. I could not eat, and drank a couple of whiskies. They did not taste right. Everything seemed tame, compared with the air, which I breathed like a drunken man.

I bought a few pounds of tea, canned goods, cheese and fruit, which I sent by a keeper to my friends in stir. I also bought for my friends a few dollars' worth of morphine and some pulverized gum opium. How could I send it to them, for the keeper was not "next" to the Underground? Suddenly I had an idea. I bought ten cents worth of walnuts, split them, took the meat out, put the morphine and opium in, closed them with mucilage, put them in a bag and sent them to the convicts with the basket of other things I had left with the innocent keeper.

I got aboard my train, and as I pulled out

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

of the town of Auburn gave a great sigh of relief. I longed to go directly to New York, for I always did like big cities, particularly Manhattan, and I was dying to see some of my old girls. But I stopped off at Syracuse, according to promises, to deliver some messages to the relatives of convicts, and so reached New York a few hours later than my family and friends had expected. They had gone to meet an earlier train, and had not waited, so that when I reached my native city after this long absence I found nobody at the station to welcome me back. It made me sad for a moment, but when I passed out into the streets of the big town I felt excited and joyous, and so confused that I thought I knew almost everybody on the street. I nearly spoke to a stranger, a woman, thinking she was Blonde Mamie.

I soon reached the Bowery and there met some of my old pals; but was much surprised to find them changed and older. For years and years a convict lives in a dream. He is isolated from the realities of the outside world. In stir he is a machine, and his mind is continually dwelling on the last time he was at liberty; he thinks of his family and friends as

*In Stir and Out.*

they were then. They may have become old, sickly and wrinkled, but he does not realize this. When, set free, he tries to find them, he expects that they will be unchanged, but if he finds them at all, what a shock ! An old-timer I knew, a man named Packey, who had served fifteen years out of a life sentence, and had been twice declared insane, told me that he had reached a state of mind in which he imagined himself to be still a young fellow, of the age he was when he first went to stir.

## CHAPTER X.

### *At the Graft Again.*

I SPENT my first day in New York looking up my old pals and girls, especially the latter. How I longed to exchange friendly words with a woman! But the girls I knew were all gone, and I was forced to make new acquaintances on the spot. I spent all the afternoon and most of the evening with a girl I picked up on the Bowery; I thought she was the most beautiful creature in the world; but when I saw her again weeks afterwards, when women were not so novel to me, I found her almost hideous. I must have longed for a young woman's society, for I did not go to see my poor old mother until I had left my Bowery acquaintance. And yet my mother had often proved herself my only friend! But I had a long talk with her before I slept, and when I left her for a stroll in the wonderful city before going to bed my resolution to be good was keener than ever.

*At the Graft Again.*

As I sauntered along the Bowery that night the desire to talk to an old pal was strong. But where was I to find a friend? Only in places where thieves hung out. "Well," I said to myself, "there is no harm in talking to my old pals. I will tell them there is nothing in the graft, and that I have squared it." I dropped into a music hall, a resort for pick-pockets, kept by an old gun, and there I met Teddy, whom I had not seen for years.

"Hello, Jim," he said, giving me the glad hand, "I thought you were dead."

"Not quite so bad as that, Teddy," I replied, "I am still in evidence."

We had a couple of beers. I could not quite make up my mind to tell him I had squared it; and he put me next to things in town.

"Take my advice," he said, "and keep away from ——— (naming certain clubs and saloons where thieves congregated). The proprietors of these places and the guns that hang out there, many of them anyway, are not on the level. Some of the grafters who go there have the reputation of being clever dips, but they have protection from the Front Office men because they are rats and so can

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

tear things open without danger. By giving up a certain amount of stuff and dropping a stall or two occasionally to keep up the flyman's reputation, they are able to have a bank account and never go to stir. The flymen hang out in these joints, waiting for a tip, and they are bad places for a grafter who is on the level."

I listened with attention, and said, by force of habit :

"Put me next to the stool-pigeons, Teddy. You know I am just back from stir."

"Well," he answered, "outside of so and so (and he mentioned half-a-dozen men by name) none of them who hang out in those joints can be trusted. Come to my house, Jim, and we'll have a long talk about old times, and I will introduce you to some good people (meaning thieves)."

I went with him to his home, which was in a tenement house in the lower part of the first ward. He introduced me to his wife and children and a number of dips, burglars and strong-armed men who made his place a kind of rendezvous. We talked old times and graft, and the wife and little boy of eight years old listened attentively. The boy had

*At the Graft Again.*

a much better chance to learn the graft than I had when a kid, for my father was an honest man.

The three strong-arm men (highwaymen) were a study to me, for they were Westerners, with any amount of nerve. One of them, Denver Red, a big powerful fellow, mentioned a few bits he had done in Western prisons, explained a few of his grafts and seemed to despise New York guns, whom he considered cowardly. He said the Easterners feared the police too much, and always wanted to fix things before they dared to graft.

I told them a little about New York State penitentiaries, and then Ted said to Denver Red: "What do you think of the big fellow?" Denver grinned, and the others followed suit, and I heard the latest story. A well-known politician, leader of his district, a cousin of Senator Wet Coin; a man of gigantic stature, with the pleasing name, I will say, of Flower, had had an adventure. He is even better developed physically than mentally, and virtually king of his district, and whenever he passes by, the girls bow to him, the petty thief calls him "Mister" and men and women alike call him "Big Flower." Well, one night not

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

long before the gathering took place in Teddy's house, Big Flower was passing through the toughest portion of his bailiwick, humming rag-time, when my new acquaintances, the three strong-arm workers from the West, stuck him up with cannisters, and relieved him of a five carat diamond stud, a gold watch and chain and a considerable amount of cash. The next day there was consternation among the clan of the Wet Coins, for Big Flower, who had been thus nipped, was their idol. We all laughed heartily at the story, and I went home and to sleep.

The next day I found it a very easy thing to drift back to my old haunts. In the evening I went to a sporting house on Twenty-seventh Street, where a number of guns hung out. I got the glad hand and an invitation to join in some good graft. I said I was done with the Rocky Path. They smiled and gently said: "We have been there, too, Jim."

One of them added: "By the way, I hear you are up against the hop, Jim." It was Billy, and he invited me home with him. There I met Ida, as pretty a little shop girl as one wants to see. Billy said there was always



*At the Graft Again.*

an opening for me, that times were pretty good. He and Ida had an opium layout, and they asked me to take a smoke. I told them my nerves were not right, and that I had quit. "Poor fellow," said Billy.

Perhaps it was the sight or smell of the hop, but anyway I got the 'yen-yen and shook as in an ague. My eyes watered and I grew as pale as a sheet. I thought my bones were unjointing and took a pint of whiskey; it had no effect. Then Billy acted as my physician and prepared a pill for me. So vanished one good resolution. My only excuse to myself was: Human nature is weak, aint it? No sooner had I taken the first pill than a feeling of ecstasy came over me. I became talkative, and Billy, noticing the effect, said: "Jim, before you try to knock off the hop, you had better wait till you reach the next world." The opium brought peace to my nerves and dulled my conscience and I had a long talk with Billy and Ida about old pals. They told me who was dead, who were in stir and who were good (prosperous).

Not many days after my opium fall I got a note from Ethel, who had heard that I had come home. In the letter she said that she

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

was not happy with her husband, that she had married to please her father and to get a comfortable home. She wanted to make an appointment to meet me, whom, she said, she had always loved. I knew what her letter meant, and I did not answer it, and did not keep the appointment. My relation to her was the only decent thing in my life, and I thought I might as well keep it right. I have never seen her since the last time she visited me at Auburn.

For some time after getting back from stir I tried for a job, but the effort was only half-hearted on my part, and people did not fall over themselves in their eagerness to find something for the ex-convict to do. Even if I had had the best intentions in the world, the path of the ex-convict is a difficult one, as I have since found. I was run down physically, and could not carry a hod or do any heavy labor, even if I had desired to. I knew no trade and should have been forever distrusted by the upper world. The only thing I could do well was to graft; and the only society that would welcome me was that of the under world. My old pals knew I had the requisite nerve and was capable of taking

### *At the Graft Again.*

my place in any good mob. My resolutions began to ooze away, especially as at that time my father was alive and making enough money to support the rest of the family. So I had only myself to look out for—and that was a lot ; for I had my old habits, and new ones I had formed in prison, to satisfy. When I stayed quietly at home I grew intensely nervous ; and soon I felt that I was bound to slip back to the world of graft. I am convinced that I would never have returned to stir or to my old trade, however, if my environment had been different, on my release, from what it had been formerly ; and if I could have found a job. I don't say this in the way of complaint. I now know that a man can reform even among his old associates. It is impossible, as the reader will see, I believe, before he finishes this book, for me ever to fall back again. Some men acquire wisdom at twenty-one, some not till they are thirty-five, and some never. Wisdom came to me when I was thirty-five. If I had had my present experience, I should not have fallen after my first bit ; but I might not have fallen anyway, if I had been placed in a better environment after my first term in prison. A man can stand alone, if he is strong enough,

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

and has sufficient reasons ; but if he is tottering, he needs outside help.

I was tottering, and did not get the help, and so I speedily began to graft again. I started in on easy game, on picking pockets and simple swindling. I made my first touch, after my return, on Broadway. One day I met the Kid there, looking for a dollar as hard as a financier. He asked me if I was not about ready to begin again, and pointed out a swell Moll, big, breezy and blonde, coming down the street, with a large wallet sticking out of her pocket. It seemed easy, with no come-back in sight, and I agreed to stall for the Kid. Just as she went into Denning's which is now Wanamaker's, I went in ahead of her, turned and met her. She stopped ; and at that moment the Kid nicked her. We got away all right and found in the wallet over one hundred dollars and a small knife. In the knife were three rivets, which we discovered on inspection to be magnifying glasses. We applied our eyes to the same and saw some pictures which would have made Mr. Anthony Comstock howl ; if he had found this knife on this aristocratic lady he would surely have sent her to the penitentiary. It was a

*At the Graft Again.*

beautiful pearl knife, gold tipped, and must have been a loss ; and yet I felt I was justified in taking that wallet. I thought I had done the lady a good turn. She might have been fined, and why shouldn't I have the money, rather than the magistrate ?

The Kid was one of the cleverest dips I ever knew ; he was delicate and cunning, and the best stone-getter in the city. But he had one weakness that made him almost a devil. He fell in love with every pretty face he saw, and cared no more for leading a girl astray than I minded kicking a cat. I felt sorry for many a little working girl he had shaken after a couple of weeks ; and I used to jolly them to cheer them up.

I once met Kate, one of them, and said, with a smile : " Did you hear about the Kid's latest ? Why don't you have him arrested for bigamy ? "

She did not smile at first, but said : " He'll never have any luck. My mother is a widow, and she prays to God to afflict him with a widow's curse. "

" One of the Ten Commandments, " I replied, " says, ' thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain, ' and between you

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

and me, Kate, the commandment does not say that widows have the monopoly on cursing. It is a sin, anyway, whether it is a man, a girl or a widow."

This was too deep for Kate.

"Stop preaching, Jim," she said, "and give me a drink," and I did. After she had drunk half-a-dozen glasses of beer she felt better.

Women are queer, anyway. No matter how bad they are, they are always good. All women are thieves, or rather petty pilferers, bless them! When I was just beginning to graft again, and was going it easy, I used to work a game which well showed the natural grafting propensities of women. I would buy a lot of Confederate bills for a few cents, and put them in a good leather. When I saw a swell-looking Moll, evidently out shopping, walking along the street, I would drop the purse in her path; and just as she saw it I would pick it up, as if I had just found it. Nine women out of ten would say, "It's mine, I dropped it." I would open the leather and let her get a peep of the bills, and that would set her pilfering propensities going. "It's mine," she would repeat. "What's in it?" I would hold the leather carefully away from

*At the Graft Again.*

her, look into it cautiously and say: "I can see a twenty dollar bill, a thirty dollar bill, and a one hundred dollar bill, but how do I know you dropped it?" Then she'd get excited and exclaim, "If you don't give it to me quick I'll call a policeman." "Madam," I would reply, "I am an honest workingman, and if you will give me ten dollars for a reward, I will give you this valuable purse." Perhaps she would then say: "Give me the pocket-book and I'll give you the money out of it." To that I would reply: "No, Madam, I wish you to receive the pocket-book just as it was." I would then hand her the book and she would give me a good ten dollar bill. "There is a woman down the street," I would continue, "looking for something." That would alarm her and away she would go without even opening the leather to see if her money was all right. She wouldn't shop any more that day, but would hasten home to examine her treasure—worth, as she would discover to her sorrow, about thirty cents. Then, no doubt, her conscience would trouble her. At least, she would weep; I am sure of that.

When I got my hand in again, I began to go for stone-getting, which was a fat graft in

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

those days, when the Lexow committee was beginning their reform. Everybody wore a diamond. Even mechanics and farmers were not satisfied unless they had pins to stick in their ties. They bought them on the installment plan, and I suppose they do yet. I could always find a laborer or a hod-carrier that had a stone. They usually called attention to it by keeping their hands carefully on it; and very often it found its way into my pocket, for carelessness is bound to come as soon as a man thinks he is safe. They probably thought of their treasure for months afterwards; at least, whenever the collector came around for the weekly installments of pay for stones they no longer possessed.

It was about this time that I met General Brace and the Professor. One was a Harvard graduate, and the other came from good old Yale; and both were grafters. When I knew them they used to hang out in a joint on Seventh Street, waiting to be treated. They had been good grafters, but through hop and booze had come down from forging and queer-shoving to common shop-lifting and petty larceny business. General Brace was very reticent in regard to his family and his own



*At the Graft Again.*

past, but as I often invited him to smoke opium with me, he sometimes gave me little confidences. I learned that he came from a well-known Southern family, and had held a good position in his native city ; but he was a blood, and to satisfy his habits he began to forge checks. His relatives saved him from prison, but he left home and started on the downward career of graftdom. We called him General Brace because he looked like a soldier and was continually on the borrow ; but a good story always accompanied his asking for a loan and he was seldom refused. I have often listened to this man after he had smoked a quantity of opium, and his conversational powers were something remarkable. Many a gun and politician would listen to him with wonder. I used to call him General Brace Coleridge.

The Professor was almost as good a talker. We used to treat them both, in order to get them to converse together. It was a liberal education to hear them hold forth in that low-down saloon, where some of the finest talks on literature and politics were listened to with interest by men born and bred on the East Side, with no more education than a turnip, but with keen wits. The graduates had good

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

manners, and we liked them and staked them regularly. They used to write letters for politicians and guns who could not read or write. They stuck together like brothers. If one of them had five cents, he would go into a morgue (gin-mill where rot-gut whiskey could be obtained for that sum) and pour out almost a full tumbler of booze. Just as he sipped a little of the rot-gut, his pal would come in, as though by accident. If it was the General who had made the purchase, he would say: "Hello, old pal, just taste this fine whiskey. It tastes like ten-cent stuff." The Professor would take a sip and become enthusiastic. They would sip and exclaim in turn, until the booze was all gone, and no further expense incurred. This little trick grew into a habit, and the bar-tender got on to it, but he liked Colonel Brace and the Professor so much that he used to wink at it.

I was in this rot-gut saloon one day when I met Jesse R——, with whom I had spent several years in prison. I have often wondered how this man happened to join the under world; for he not only came of a good family and was well educated, but was also of a good, quiet disposition, a prime favorite in stir and out.

*At the Graft Again.*

He was tactful enough never to roast convicts, who are very sensitive, and was so sympathetic that many a heartache was poured into his ear. He never betrayed a friend's confidence.

I was glad to meet Jesse again, and we exchanged greetings in the little saloon. When he asked me what I was doing, I replied that I had a mortgage on the world and that I was trying to draw my interest from the same. I still had that old dream, that the world owed me a living. I confided in him that I regarded the world as my oyster more decidedly than I had done before I met him in stir. I found that Jesse, however, had squared it for good and was absolutely on the level. He had a good job as shipping clerk in a large mercantile house ; when I asked him if he was not afraid of being tipped off by some Central Office man or by some stool-pigeon, he admitted that that was the terror of his life ; but that he had been at work for eighteen months, and hoped that none of his enemies would turn up. I asked him who had recommended him for the job, and I smiled when he answered : " General Brace ". That clever Harvard graduate often wrote letters which were of assistance to guns who had

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

squared it ; though the poor fellow could not take care of himself.

Jesse had a story to tell which seemed to me one of the saddest I have heard : and as I grew older I found that most all stories about people in the under world, no matter how cheerfully they began, ended sadly. It was about his brother, Harry, the story that Jesse told. Harry was married, and there is where the trouble often begins. When Jesse was in prison Harry, who was on the level and occupied a good position as a book-keeper, used to send him money, always against his wife's wishes. She also complained because Harry supported his old father. Harry toiled like a slave for this woman who scolded him and who spent his money recklessly. He made a good salary, but he could not keep up with her extravagance. One time, while in the country, she met a sporting man, Mr. O. B. In a few weeks it was the old, old story of a foolish woman and a pretty good fellow. While she was in the country, her young son was drowned, and she sent Harry a telegram announcing it. But she kept on living high and her name and that of O. B. were often coupled. Harry tried to stifle his sorrow and kept on sending money

*At the Graft Again.*

to the bladder he called wife, who appeared in a fresh new dress whenever she went out with Mr. O. B. One day Harry received a letter, calling him to the office to explain his accounts. He replied that he had been sick, but would straighten everything out the next day. When his father went to awaken him in the morning, Harry was dead. A phial of morphine on the floor told the story. Jesse reached his brother's room in time to hear his old father's cry of anguish and to read a letter from Harry, explaining that he had robbed the firm of thousands, and asking his brother to be kind to Helene, his wife.

Then Jesse went to see the woman, to tell her about her husband's death. He found her at a summer hotel with Mr. O. B., and heard the servants talk about them.

"Jim," said Jesse to me, at this point in the story, "here is wise council. Wherever thou goest, keep the portals of thy lugs open; as you wander on through life you are apt to hear slander about your women folks. What is more entertaining than a little scandal, especially when it doesn't hit home? But don't look into it too deep, for it generally turns out true, or worse. I laid a trap for my

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

poor brother's wife, and one of her letters, making clear her guilt, fell into my hands. A telegram in reply from Mr. O. B., likewise came to me, and in a murderous frame of mind, I read its contents, and then laughed like a hyena: 'I am sorry I cannot meet you, but I was married this morning, and am going on my wedding tour. *Au Revoir.*' You ask me what became of my sister-in-law? Jim, she is young and pretty, and will get along in this world. But, truly, the wages of sin is to her Living Ashes."

It was not very long after my return home that I was at work again, not only at safe dipping and swindling, but gradually at all my old grafts, including more or less house work. There was a difference, however. I grew far more reckless than I had been before I went to prison. I now smoked opium regularly, and had a lay-out in my furnished room and a girl to run it. The drug made me take chances I never used to take; and I became dead to almost everything that was good. I went home very seldom. I liked my family in a curious way, but I did not have enough vitality or much feeling about anything. I began to go out to graft always in a dazed

### *At the Graft Again.*

condition, so much so that on one occasion a pal tried to take advantage of my state of mind. It was while I was doing a bit of housework with Sandy and Hacks, two clever grafters. We inserted into the lock the front door key which we had made, threw off the tumblers, and opened the door. Hacks and I stalled while Sandy went in and got six hundred dollars and many valuable jewels. He did not show us much of the money, however. The next day the newspapers described the "touch," and told the amount of money which had been stolen. Then I knew I had been "done" by Sandy and Hacks, who stood in with him, but Sandy said the papers were wrong. The mean thief, however, could not keep his mouth shut, and I got him. I am glad I was not arrested for murder. It was a close shave, for I cut him unmercifully with a knife. In this I had the approval of my friends, for they all believed the worst thing a grafter could do was to sink a pal. Sandy did not squeal, but he swore he would get even with me. Even if I had not been so reckless as I was then, I would not have feared him, for I knew there was no come-back in him.

Another thing the dope did was to make

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

me laugh at everything. It was fun for me to graft, and I saw the humor of life. I remember I used to say that this world is the best possible ; that the fine line of cranks and fools in it gives it variety. One day I had a good laugh in a Brooklyn car. Tim, George and I got next to a Dutchman who had a large prop in his tie. He stood for a newspaper under his chin, and his stone came as slick as grease. A minute afterwards he missed his property, and we did not dare to move. He told his wife, who was with him, that his stone was gone. She called him a fool, and said that he had left it at home, in the bureau drawer, that she remembered it well. Then he looked down and saw that his front was gone, too. He said to his wife : " I am sure I had my watch and chain with me," but his wife was so superior that she easily convinced him he had left it at home. The wisdom of women is beyond finding out. But I enjoyed that incident. I shall never forget the look that came over the Dutchman's face when he missed his front.

I was too sleepy those days to go out of town much on the graft ; and was losing my ambition generally. I even cared very little



*At the Graft Again.*

for the girls, and gave up many of my amusements. I used to stay most of the time in my furnished room, smoking hop. When I went out it was to get some dough quick, and to that end I embraced almost any means. At night I often drifted into some concert hall, but it was not like the old days when I was a kid. The Bowery is far more respectable now than it ever was before. Twenty years ago there was no worse place possible for ruining girls and making thieves than Billy McGlory's joint on Hester Street. About ten o'clock in the morning slumming parties would chuckle with glee when the doors at McGlory's would be closed and young girls in scanty clothing, would dance the can-can. These girls would often fight together, and frequently were beaten unmercifully by the men who lived on them and their trade. Often men were forcibly robbed in these joints. There was little danger of an arrest; for if the sucker squealed, the policeman on the beat would club him off to the beat of another copper, who would either continue the process, or arrest him for disorderly conduct.

At this time, which was just before the Lexow Committee began its work, there were

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

at least a few honest coppers. I knew one, however, that did not remain honest. It happened this way. The guns had been tearing open the cars so hard that the street car companies, as they had once before, got after the officials, who stirred up Headquarters. The riot act was read to the dips. This meant that, on the second offense, every thief would be settled for his full time and that there would be no squaring it. The guns lay low for a while, but two very venturesome grafters, Mack and Jerry, put their heads together and reasoned thus: "Now that the other guns are alarmed it is a good chance for us to get in our fine work."

Complaints continued to come in. The police grew hot and sent Mr. F——, a flyman, to get the rascals. Mr. F—— had the reputation of being the most honest detective on the force. He often declared that he wanted promotion only on his merits. Whenever he was overheard in making this remark there was a quiet smile on the faces of the other coppers. F—— caught Mack dead to rights, and, not being a diplomat, did not understand when the gun tried to talk reason to him. Even a large piece of dough did not help his intellect,

*At the Graft Again.*

and Mack was taken to the station-house. When a high official heard about it he swore by all the gods that he would make an example of that notorious pickpocket, Mack ; but human nature is weak, especially if it wears buttons. Mack sent for F——'s superior, the captain, and the following dialogue took place :

*Captain :* What do you want ?

*Mack :* I'm copped.

*Captain :* Yes, and you're dead to rights.

*Mack :* I tried to do business with F——. What is the matter with him ?

*Captain :* He is a policeman. He wants his promotion by merit. (Even the Captain smiled.)

*Mack :* I'd give five centuries (five hundred dollars) if I could get to my summer residence in Asbury Park.

*Captain :* How long would it take you to get it ?

*Mack :* (He, too, was laconic.) I got it on me.

*Captain :* Give it here.

*Mack :* It's a sure turn-out ?

*Captain :* Was I ever known to go back on my word ?

Mack handed the money over, and went

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

over to court in the afternoon with F——. The Captain was there, and whispered to F——: "Throw him out." That nearly knocked F—— down, but he and Mack took a car, and he said to the latter: "In the name of everything how did you hypnotize the old man?" Mack replied, with a laugh: "I tried to mesmerize you in the same way; but you are working on your merits."

Mack was discharged, and F—— decided to be a diplomat henceforth. From an honest copper he became as clever a panther as ever shook coin from a gun. Isn't it likely that if a man had a large income he would never go to prison? Indeed, do you think that well-known guns could graft with impunity unless they had some one right? Nay! Nay! Hannah. They often hear the song of split half or no graft.

But at that time I was so careless that I did not even have enough sense to save fall-money, and after about nine months of freedom I fell again. One day three of us boarded a car in Brooklyn and I saw a mark whom I immediately nicked for his red super, which I passed quickly to one of my stalls, Eddy. We got off the car and walked about three

*At the Graft Again.*

blocks, when Eddy flashed the super, to look at it. The sucker, who had been tailing, blew, and Eddy threw the watch to the ground, fearing that he would be nailed. A crowd gathered around the super, I among them, the other stall, Eddy having vamoosed, and the sucker. No man in his senses would have picked up that gold watch. But I did it and was nailed dead to rights. I felt that super belonged to me. I had nicked it cleverly, and I thought I had earned it ! I was sentenced to four years in Sing Sing, but I did not hang my head with shame, this time, as I was taken to the station. It was the way of life and of those I associated with, and I was more a fatalist than ever. I hated all mankind and cared nothing for the consequences of my acts.

## CHAPTER XI.

### *Back to Prison.*

I WAS not recognized by the authorities at Sing Sing as having been there before. I gave a different name and pedigree, of course, but the reason I was not known as a second-timer was that I had spent only nine months at Sing Sing on my first term, the remainder having been passed at Auburn. There was a new warden at Sing Sing, too, and some of the other officials had changed; and, besides, I must have been lucky. Anyway, none of the keepers knew me, and this meant a great deal to me; for if I had been recognized as a second-timer I should have had a great deal of extra time to serve. On my first term I had received commutation time for good behavior amounting to over a year, and there is a rule that if a released convict is sent back to prison, he must serve, not only the time given him on his second sentence, but the commutation time on his first bit. Somebody must

*Back to Prison.*

have been very careless, for I beat the State out of more than a year.

Some of the convicts, indeed, knew that I had served before; but they did not squeal. Even some of those who did not know me had an inkling of it, but would not tell. It was still another instance of honor among thieves. If they had reported me to the authorities, they might have had an easier time in stir and had many privileges, such as better jobs and better things to eat. There were many stool-pigeons there, of course, but somehow these rats did not get wind of me.

It did not take me long to get the Underground Tunnel in working order again, and I received contraband letters, booze, opium and morphine as regularly as on my first bit. One of the screws running the Tunnel at the time, Jack R——, was a little heavier in his demands than I thought fair. He wanted a third instead of a fifth of the money sent the convicts from home. But he was a good fellow, and always brought in the hop as soon as it arrived. Like the New York police he was hot after the stuff, but who can blame him? He wanted to rise in the world, and was more ambitious than the other screws. I continued my pipe

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

dreams, and my reading ; indeed, they were often connected. I frequently used to imagine that I was a character in one of the books ; and often choked the detestable Tarquin into insensibility.

On one occasion I dreamed that I was arraigned before my Maker and charged with murder. I cried with fear and sorrow, for I felt that even before the just God there was no justice ; but a voice silenced me and said that to be guilty of the crime of murder, it was not necessary to use weapons or poison. Suddenly I seemed to see the sad faces of my father and mother, and then I knew what the voice meant. Indeed, I was guilty. I heard the word, "Begone," and sank into the abyss. After many thousand years of misery I was led into the Chamber of Contentment where I saw some of the great men whose books I had read. Voltaire, Tom Paine and Galileo sat on a throne, but when I approached them with awe, the angel, who had the face of a keeper, told me to leave. I appealed to Voltaire, and begged him not to permit them to send me among the hymn-singers. He said he pittied me, but that I was not fit to be with the great elect. I asked him where Dr.



## *Back to Prison.*

Parkhurst was, and he answered that the doctor was hot stuff and had evaporated long ago. I was led away sorrowing, and awoke in misery and tears, in my dark and damp cell.

On this bit I was assigned to the clothing department, where I stayed six months, but did very little work. Warden Sage replaced Warden Darson and organized the system of stool-pigeons in stir more carefully than ever before; so it was more difficult than it was before to neglect our work. I said to Sage one day: "You're a cheap guy. You ought to be President of a Woman's Sewing Society. You can do nothing but make an aristocracy of stool-pigeons." I gave up work after six months because of my health, which had been bad for a long time, but now grew worse. My rapid life on the outside, my bad habits, and my experience in prison were beginning to tell on me badly. There was a general breaking-down of my system. I was so weak and coughed so badly that they thought I was dying. The doctors said I had consumption and transferred me to the prison hospital, where I had better air and food and was far more comfortable in body but terribly low in

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

my mind. I was so despondent that I did not even "fan my face" (turn my head away to avoid having the outside world become familiar with my features) when visitors went through the hospital. This was an unusual degree of carelessness for a professional gun. One reason I was so gloomy was that I was now unable to get hold of my darling hop.

I was so despondent in the hospital that I really thought I should soon become an angel ; and my environment was not very cheerful, for several convicts died on beds near me. Whenever anybody was going to die, every convict in the prison knew about it, for the attendants would put three screens around the dying man's bed. There were about twenty beds in the long room, and near me was an old boyhood pal, Tommy Ward, in the last stages of consumption. Tommy and I often talked together about death, and neither of us was afraid of it. I saw a dozen men die during my experience in state prisons and I never heard one of them clamor for a clergyman. Tommy was doing life for murder, and ought to have been afraid of death, if anyone was. But when he was about to die, he sent word to me to come to his bedside, and after a word or two

## *Back to Prison.*

of good-bye he went into his agony. The last words he ever said were : " Ah, give me a big Peter (narcotic) ." He did not receive the last rites of the Catholic Church, and his ignorant family refused to bury him. So Tommy's cell number was put on the tombstone, if it could be called such, which marked his grave in the little burying ground outside the prison walls.

Indeed, it is not easy to throw the religious con (confidence game) into a convict. Often, while we were in chapel, the dominie would tell us that life was short ; but hardly one of the six or seven hundred criminals who were listening believed the assertion. They felt that the few years they were doing for the good of their country were as long as centuries. If there were a few " cons " who tried the cheerful dodge, they did not deceive anybody, for their brother guns knew that they were sore in their hearts because they had been caught without fall-money, and so had to serve a few million years in stir.

After I got temporarily better in health and had left the hospital, I began to read Lavater on physiognomy more industriously than ever. With his help I became a close student

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

of faces, and I learned to tell the thoughts and emotions of my fellow convicts. I watched them at work and when their faces flushed I knew they were thinking of Her. Sometimes I would ask a man how She was, and he would look confused, and perhaps angry because his day dream was disturbed. And how the men used to look at women visitors who went through the shops! It was against the rules to look at the inhabitants of the Upper World who visited stir, but I noticed that after women visitors had been there the convicts were generally more cheerful. Even a momentary glimpse of those who lived within the pale of civilization warmed their hearts. After the ladies had gone the convicts would talk about them for hours. Many of their remarks were vulgar and licentious, but some of the men were broken down with feeling and would say soft things. They would talk about their mothers and sweethearts and eventually drift back on their ill-spent lives. How often I thought of the life behind me! Then I would look at the men about me, some of whom had stolen millions and had international reputations—but all discouraged now, broken down in health, penniless and friend-

## *Back to Prison.*

less. If a man died in stir he was just a cadaver for the dissecting table, nothing more. The end fitted in well with his misspent life. These reflections would bring us around again to good resolutions.

People who have never broken the law—I beg pardon, who were never caught—can not understand how a man who has once served in stir will take another chance and go back and suffer the same tortures. A society lady I once met said she thought criminals who go on grafting, when they know what the result will be, must be lacking in imagination. I replied to her: “Madam, why do you lace tight and indulge in social dissipation even after you know it is bad for the health? You know it is a strain on your nerves, but you do it. Is it because you have no imagination? That which we all dread most—death—we all defy.”

The good book says that all men shall earn their bread by the sweat of their brow, but we grafters make of ourselves an exception, with that overweening egotism and brash desire to do others with no return, which is natural to everybody. Only when the round-up comes, either in the sick bed or in the toils, we often

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

can not bear our burdens and look around to put the blame on someone else. If a man is religious, why should he not drop it on Jesus? Man! How despicable at times! How ungallant to his ancestor of the softer sex! From time immemorial he has exclaimed: "Only for her, the deceiving one, my better half, I should be perfect."

Convicts, particularly if they are broken in health, often become like little children. It is not unusual for them to grow dependent on dumb pets, which they smuggle into prison by means of the Underground Tunnel. The man in stir who has a white mouse or robin is envied by the other convicts, for he has something to love. If an artist could only witness the affection that is centered on a mouse or dog, if he could only depict the emotions in the hard face of the criminal, what a story! I had a white rat, which I had obtained with difficulty through the Underground. I used to put him up my sleeve, and he would run all over my body, he was so tame. He would stand on his hind legs or lie down at my command. Sometimes, when I was lonely and melancholy, I loved this rat like a human being.

## *Back to Prison.*

In May, 1896, when I still had about a year to serve on my second term, a rumor circulated through the prison that some of the Salvation Army were going to visit the stir. The men were greatly excited at the prospect of a break in the dreary routine. I imagined that a big burly Salvationist, beating a drum, with a few very thin Salvation lasses, would march through the prison yard. I was dumbfounded by the reality, for I saw enter the Protestant chapel, which was crowded with eager convicts, two delicate, pretty women. No actor or actress ever got a warmer welcome than that given to Mrs. Booth and her secretary, Captain Jennie Hughes. After the clapping of hands and cheering had ceased, Mrs. Booth arose and made a speech, which was listened to in deep silence. Certainly she was eloquent, and what she said impressed many an old gun. She was the first visitor who ever promised practical Christianity and eventually carried out the promise. She promised to build homes for us after our release; and in many cases, she did, and we respect her. She spoke for an hour, and afterwards granted private interviews, and many of the convicts told her all their troubles, and she promised to take

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

care of their old mothers, daughters and wives.

Before leaving the chapel, she sang: "O Lord, let the waves of thy crimson sea roll over me." I did not see how such a pretty, intelligent, refined and educated woman could say such a bloody thing, but she probably had forgotten what the words really meant. At any rate, she is a good woman, for she tried hard to have the Parole Bill passed. That bill has recently become a law, and it is a good one, in my opinion; but it has one fault. It only effects first-timers. The second and third timers, who went to Sing Sing years ago when there was contract labor and who worked harder than any laborer in New York City, ought to have a chance, too. Show a little confidence in any man, even though he be a third-timer, as I have been, and he will be a better man for it.

After the singing, on that first morning of Mrs. Booth's visit, she asked those convicts who wanted to lead a better life to stand up. About seventy men out of the five or six hundred arose, and the others remained seated. I was not among those who stood up. I never met anybody who could touch me in



## *Back to Prison.*

that way. I don't believe in instantaneous Christianity. I knew half a dozen of the men who stood up, and they were not very strong mentally. I often wondered what the motives were that moved the men in that manner. Man is a social animal, and Mrs. Booth was a magnetic woman. After I had heard her speak once, I knew that. She had a good personal appearance and one other requisite that appealed strongly to those who were in our predicament—her sex. Who could entirely resist the pleadings of a pretty woman with large black eyes?

Certainly I was moved by this sincere and attractive woman, but my own early religious training had made me suspicious of the whole business. Whenever anybody tried to reform me through Christianity I always thought of that powerful Celt who used to rush at me in Sunday school with a hickory stick and shout "Who made you?" And I don't think that most of the men who profess religion in prison are sincere. They usually want to curry favor with the authorities, or get "staked" after they leave stir. One convict, whom I used to call "The Great American Identifier," because he used to graft by claiming to be a relative

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

of everybody that died, from California to Maine and weeping over the dead body, was the worst hypocrite I ever saw—a regular Uriah Heep. He was one of Mrs. Booth's converts and stood up in chapel. After she went away he said to me: "What a blessing has been poured into my soul since I heard Mrs. Booth." Another hypocrite said to me on the same occasion: "I don't know what I would do only for Mrs. Booth. She has lightened my weary burdens." Now, I would not trust either of those men with a box of matches; and so I said to the Great American Identifier: "You are the meanest, most despicable thief in the whole stir. I'd respect you if you had the nerve to rob a live man, but you always stole from a cadaver." He was horrified at my language and began to talk of a favorite subject with him—his wealthy relatives.

Some of these converts were not hypocrites, but I don't think even they received any good from their conversion. Some people go to religion because they have nothing else to distract their thoughts, and the subject sometimes is a mania with them. The doctors say that there is only one incurable mental

disease—religious insanity. In the eyes of the reformers Mrs. Booth does a great thing by making some of us converts, but experts in mental diseases declare that it is very bad to excite convicts to such a pitch. Many of the weak-minded among them lose their balance and become insane through these violent religious emotions.

I did not meet so many of the big guns on my second term as on my first ; but, of course, I came across many of my old pals and formed some new acquaintances. It was on this term that four of us used to have what I called a tenement house oratory talk whenever we worked together in the halls. Some of us were lucky enough at times to serve as barbers, hall-men and runners to and from the shops, and we used to gather together in the halls and amuse ourselves with conversation. Dickey, Mull, Mickey and I became great pals in this way. Dickey was a desperate river pirate who would not stand a roast from anybody, but was well liked. Mull was one of the best principled convicts I ever knew in my life. He was quiet, delicate and manly, and opposed to abusing young boys, yet if you did him an injury he would cut the liver out of you. He

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

was a good fellow. Mickey was what I called a tenement house philosopher. He'd stick his oar into every bit of talk that was started. One day the talk began on Tammany Hall and went something like this :

"All crooked officials," said Mull, "including all of them, ought to be railroaded to Sing Sing."

*Dickey:* "Through their methods the county offices are rotten from the judge to the policeman."

*Mull:* "I agree with you."

*Mickey:* "Ah, wat's the matter wid Tammany? My old man never voted any other ticket. Neither did yours. When you get into stir you act like college professors. Why don't you practice what you spout? I always voted the Tammany ticket—five or six times every election day. How is it I never got a long bit?"

*Mull:* "How many times, Mickey, have you been in stir?"

*Mickey:* "This is the fourth, but the highest I got was four years."

*Dickey:* "You never done anything big enough to get four."

*Mickey:* "I didn't, eh? You have been

hollering that you are innocent, and get twenty years for piracy. I only get four, but I am guilty every time. There is a big difference between that and twenty, aint it?"

Mull slapped Mickey on the back and said: "Never mind. You will get yours yet on the installment plan." Then, turning to me, Mull asked: "Jim, don't you think that if everything was square and on the level we'd stand a better chance?"

"No," I replied. "In the first place we have not reached the millennium. In the second place they would devise some legal scheme to keep a third timer the rest of his natural days. I know a moccasin who would move heaven and earth to have such a bill passed, and he is one of the crookedest philanthropists in America to-day. I am a grafter, and I believe that the present administration is all right. I know that I can stay out of prison as long as I save my fall-money. When I blow that in I ought to go to prison. Every gun who is capable of stealing, knows that if he puts by enough money he can not only keep out of stir but can beat his way into heaven. I'm arguing as a professional thief."

This was too much for Mickey, who said:

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

“Why don't you talk United States and not be springing whole leaves out of a dictionary?”

Just then Big Jim came up. He had heard what I said and he joined in: “You know why I got the tenth of a century? I had thousands in my pocket and went to buy some silk underwear at a haberdasher's in New York. But it seemed to me a waste of good coin to buy them, so I stole a dozen pair of silk stockings. They tried to arrest me, I shot, and got ten years. I always did despise a petty thief, but I never felt like kicking him till then. Ten years for a few stockings! Can you blame the judge? I didn't. Even a judge admires a good thief. If I had robbed a bank I'd never have got such a long bit. The old saying is true: Kill one man and you will be hanged. Kill sixteen, and the United States Government is likely to pension you.”

The tenement-house philosopher began to object again, when the guard, as usual, came along to stop our pleasant conversation. He thought we were abusing our privileges.

It was during this bit that I met the man with the white teeth, as he is now known among his friends. I will call him Patsy, and tell his story, for it is an unusual one. He

was a good deal older man than I and was one of the old-school burglars, and a good one. They were a systematic lot, and would shoot before they stood the collar; but they were gentlemanly grafters and never abused anybody. The first thing Patsy's mob did after entering a house was to round up all the inmates and put them into one room. There one burglar would stick them up with a revolver, while the others went through the house. On a fatal occasion Patsy took the daughter of the house, a young girl of eighteen or nineteen, in his arms and carried her down stairs into the room where the rest of the family had been put by the other grafters. As he carried the girl down stairs, she said: "Mr. Burglar, don't harm me." Patsy was masked, all but his mouth, and when he said: "You are as safe as if you were in your father's arms," she saw his teeth, which were remarkably fine and white. Patsy afterwards said that the girl was not a bit alarmed, and was such a perfect coquette that she noticed his good points. The next morning she told the police that one of the bad men had a beautiful set of teeth. The flymen rounded up half a dozen grafters on suspicion, among them

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

Patsy ; and no sooner did he open his mouth, than he was recognized, and settled for a long bit. Poor Patsy has served altogether about nineteen years, but now he has squared it, and is a waiter in a Bowery saloon, more content with his twelve dollars a week than he used to be with his thousands. I often go around and have a glass with him. He is now a quiet, sober fellow, and his teeth are as fine as ever.

One day a man named "Muir," a mean, sure-thing grafter, came to the stir on a visit to some of his acquaintances. He had never done a bit himself, although he was a notorious thief. But he liked to look at the misfortunes of others, occasionally. On this visit he got more than he bargained for. He came to the clothing department where Mike, who had grafted with Muir in New York, and I, were at work. Muir went up to Mike and offered him a bill. Mike threw it in Muir's face and called him—well, the worst thing known in Graftdom. "If it wasn't for you," he said, "I wouldn't be doing this bit."

There are several kinds of sure-thing grafters. Some are crooked gamblers, some are plain stool-pigeons, some are discouraged thieves



who continue to graft but take no risks. Muir was one of the meanest of the rats that I have known, yet in a way, he was handy to the professional gun. He had somebody "right" at headquarters and could generally get protection for his mob; but he would always throw the mob over if it was to his advantage. He and two other house-work men robbed a senator's home, and such a howl went up that the police offered all manner of protection to the grafter who would tip them off to who got the stuff. Grafters who work with the coppers don't want it known among those of their own kind, for they would be ostracized. If they do a dirty trick they try to throw it on someone else who would not stoop to such a thing. Muir was a diplomat, and tipped off the Central Office, and those who did the trick, all except Tom and Muir, were nailed. A few nights after that the whisper was passed among guns of both sexes, who had gathered at a resort up-town, that somebody had squealed. The muttered curses meant that some Central Office man had by wireless telegraphy put the under world next that somebody had tipped off the police. But it was not Muir that the hard names were

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

said against: the Central Office man took care of that. With low cunning Muir had had the rumor circulated that it was Tom who had thrown them down, and Tommy was ostracized.

I knew Muir and I knew Tommy, and I was sure that the latter was innocent. Some time after Tom had been cut by the rest of the gang I saw Muir drinking with two Central Office detectives, in a well-known resort, and I was convinced that he was the rat. His personal appearance bore out my suspicion. He had a weak face, with no fight in it. He was quiet of speech, always smiling, and as soft and noiseless as the animal called the snake. He had a narrow, hanging lip, small nose, large ears, and characterless, protruding eyes. The squint look from under the eye-brows, and the quick jerk of the hand to the chin, showed without doubt that he possessed the low cunning too of that animal called the rat. Partly through my influence, Muir gradually got the reputation of being a sure-thing grafter, but he was so sleek that he could always find some grafter to work with him. Pals with whom he fell out, always shortly afterwards came to harm. That was the case

with Big Mike, who spat in Muir's face, when the latter visited him in Sing Sing. When Muir did pickpocket work, he never dipped himself, but acted as a stall. This was another sure-thing dodge. Muir never did a bit in stir because he was of more value to headquarters than a dozen detectives. The fact that he never did time was another thing that gradually made the gang suspicious of him. Therefore, at the present time he is of comparatively little value to the police force, and may be settled before long. I hope so.

One of the meanest things Muir ever did was to a poor old "dago" grafter, a queer-maker (counterfeiter). The Italian was putting out unusually good stuff, both paper and metal, and the avaricious Muir thought he saw a good chance to get a big bit of money from the dago. He put up a plan with two Central Office men to bleed the counterfeiter. Then he went to the dago and said he had got hold of some big buyers from the West who would buy five thousand dollars worth of the "queer." They met the supposed buyers, who were in reality the two Central Office men, at a little saloon. After a talk the detectives came out in their true colors, showed their

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

shields, and demanded one thousand dollars. The dago looked at Muir, who gave him the tip to pay the one thousand dollars. The Italian, however, thinking Muir was on the level, misunderstood the sign, and did not pay. The outraged detectives took the Italian to police headquarters, but did not show up the queer at first; they still wanted their one thousand dollars. So the dago was remanded and remanded, getting a hearing every twenty-four hours, but there was never enough evidence. Finally the poor fellow got a lawyer, and then the Central Office men gave up the game, and produced the queer as evidence. The United States authorities prosecuted the case, and the Italian was given three years and a half. After he was released he met Muir on the East Side, and tried to kill him with a knife. That is the only way Muir will ever get his deserts. A man like him very seldom dies in state's prison, or is buried in potter's field. He often becomes a gin-mill keeper and captain of his election district, for he understands how to control the repeaters who give Tammany Hall such large majorities on election day in Manhattan.

It was on this second bit in prison, as I

have said in another place, that the famous "fence" operated in stir. I knew him well. He was a clever fellow, and I often congratulated him on his success with the keepers; for he was no stool-pigeon and got his pull legitimately. He was an older grafter than I and remembered well Madame Mandelbaum, the Jewess, one of the best fences, before my time, in New York City. At the corner of Clinton and Rivington Streets there stood until a few years ago a small dry goods and notions store, which was the scene of transactions which many an old gun likes to talk about. What plannings of great robberies took place there, in Madame Mandelbaum's store! She would buy any kind of stolen property, from an ostrich feather to hundreds and thousands of dollars' worth of gems. The common shop-lifter and the great cracksman alike did business at this famous place. Some of the noted grafters who patronized her store were Jimmy Hope, Shang Draper, Billy Porter, Sheenie Mike, Red Leary, Johnnie Irving, Jack Walsh, alias John the Mick, and a brainy planner of big jobs, English George.

Madame Mandelbaum had two country residences in Brooklyn where she invited her

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

friends, the most famous thieves in two continents. English George, who used to send money to his son, who was being educated in England, was a frequent visitor, and used to deposit with her all his valuables. She had two beautiful daughters, one of whom became infatuated with George, who did not return her love. Later, she and her daughters, after they became wealthy, tried to rise in the world and shake their old companions. The daughters were finely dressed and well-educated, and the Madame hunted around for respectable husbands for them. Once a bright reporter wrote a play, in which the central character was Madame Mandelbaum. She read about it in the newspapers and went, with her two daughters, to see it. They occupied a private box, and were gorgeously dressed. The old lady was very indignant when she saw the woman who was supposed to be herself appear on the stage. The actress, badly dressed, and made up with a hooked nose, was jeered by the audience. After the play, Madame Mandelbaum insisted on seeing the manager of the theatre. She showed him her silks and her costly diamonds and then said: "Look at me. I am Madame Mandelbaum.

Does that huzzy look anything like me?" Pointing to her daughters she continued: "What must my children think of such an impersonation? Both of them are better dressed and have more money and education than that strut, who is only a moment's play-thing for bankers and brokers!"

In most ways, of course, my life in prison during the second term was similar to what it was on my first term. Books and opium were my main pleasures. If it had not been for them and for the thoughts about life and about my fellow convicts which they led me to form, the monotony of the prison routine would have driven me mad. My health was by that time badly shattered. I was very nervous and could seldom sleep without a drug.

My moral health was far worse, too, than it had been on my first term. Then I had made strong efforts to overcome the opium habit, and laid plans to give up grafting. Then I had some decent ambitions, and did not look upon myself as a confirmed criminal; whereas on the second term, I had grown to take a hopeless view of my case. I began to feel that I could not reform, no matter how hard I

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

tried. It seemed to me, too, that it was hardly worth while now to make an effort, for I thought my health was worse than it really was and that I should die soon, with no opportunity to live the intelligent life I had learned to admire through my books. I still made good resolutions, and some effort to quit the hop, but they were weak in comparison with the efforts I had made during my first term. More and more it seemed to me that I belonged in the under world for good, and that I might as well go through it to the end. Stealing was my profession. It was all I knew how to do, and I didn't believe that anybody was interested enough in me to teach me anything else. On the other hand, what I had learned on the Rocky Path would never leave me. I was sure of my knowledge of the technique of graft, and I knew that a sucker was born every minute.



## CHAPTER XII.

### *On the Outside Again.*

My time on the second bit was drawing to a close. I was eager to get out, of course, but I knew way down in my mind, that it would be only to graft again. I made a resolution that I would regain my health and gather a little fall-money before I started in hard again on the Rocky Path.

On the day of my release, Warden Sage called me to his office and talked to me like a friend. He did not know that I was a second timer, or he might not have been so kind to me. He was a humane man, and in spite of his belief in the stool-pigeon system, he introduced good things into Sing Sing. He improved the condition of the cells and we were not confined there so much as we had been before he came. On my first term many a man staid for days in his cell without ever going out; one man was confined twenty-eight days on bread and water. But under Mr. Sage punishments were not so severe. He

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

even used to send delicacies to men chained up in the Catholic Chapel.

I should like to say a good word for Head Keeper Connoughton, too. He was not generally liked, for he was a strict disciplinarian, but I think he was one of the best keepers in the country. He was stern, but not brutal, and when a convict was sick, Mr. Connoughton was very kind. He was not deceived by the fake lunatics, and used to say : " If you go to the mad-house, you are liable to become worse. If you are all right in the morning I will give you a job out in the air." Although Mr. Connoughton had had little schooling he was an intelligent man.

I believe the best thing the community can do to reform criminals is to have a more intelligent class of keepers. As a rule they are ignorant, brutal and stupid, under-paid and inefficient; yet what is more important for the State's welfare than an intelligent treatment of convicts? Short terms, too, are better than long ones, for when the criminal is broken down in health and made fearful, suspicious and revengeful, what can you expect from him? However, in the mood I was in at the end of my second term, I did not believe that anything

was any good as a preventive of crime. I knew that when I got on the outside I wouldn't think of what might happen to me. I knew that I couldn't or wouldn't carry a hod. What ambition I had left was to become a more successful crook than I had ever been before.

Warden Sage gave me some good advice and then I left Sing Sing for New York. I did not get the pleasure from going out again that had been so keen after my first bit. My eye-sight was failing now, and I was sick and dull. My only thought was to get back to my old haunts, and I drank several large glasses of whiskey at Sing Sing town, to help me on my way. I intended to go straight home, as I felt very ill, to my father and mother, but I didn't see them for several days after my return to New York. The first thing I did in the city was to deliver some messages from my fellow convicts to their relatives. My third visit for that purpose was to the home of a fine young fellow I knew in stir. It was a large family and included a married sister and her children. They were glad to hear from Bobby, and I talked to them for some time about him, when the husband of the mar-

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

ried sister came home, and began to quarrel with his wife. He accused her of having strange men in the house, meaning me. The younger brother and the rest of the family got back at the brother-in-law and gave him better than they got. The little brother fired a lamp at him, and he yelled "murder". The police surrounded the house and took us all to the station-house in the patrol wagon. And so I spent the first night after my return in confinement. It seemed natural, however. In the morning we were taken before the magistrate, and the mother and sister testified that I had taken them a message from their boy, and had committed no offense. The brother-in-law blurted out that he had married into a family of thieves, and that I had just returned from Sing Sing. I was discharged, but fined five dollars. Blessed are the peacemakers,—but not in my case!

I passed the next day looking for old girls and pals, but I found few of them. Many were dead and others were in stir or had sunk so far down into the under world that even I could not find them. I was only about thirty-two years old, but I had already a long acquaintance with the past. Like all grafters

I had lived rapidly, crowding, while at liberty, several days into one. When I got back from my second bit the greater part of my life seemed to be made up of memories of other days. Some of the old pals I did meet again had squared it, others were "dead" (out of the game) and some had degenerated into mere bums.

There are several different classes of "dead ones":

1. The man who has lost his nerve. He generally becomes a whiskey fiend. If he becomes hopelessly a soak the better class of guns shun him, for he is no good to work with. He will not keep an engagement, or will turn up at the place of meeting too late or too early. A grafter must be exactly on time. It is as bad to be too early as too late, for he must not be seen hanging around the place of meeting. Punctuality is more of a virtue in the under world than it is in respectable society. The slackest people I know to keep their appointments, are the honest ones; or grafters who have become whiskey fiends. These latter usually wind up with rot-gut booze and are sometimes seen selling songs on the Bowery.

## *The Autobiography of a Thief.*

2. The man who becomes a copper. He is known as a stool-pigeon, and is detested and feared by all grafters. Nobody will go with him. Sometimes he becomes a Pinkerton man, and is a useful member of society. When he loses his grip with the upper world, he belongs to neither, for the grafters won't look at him.

3. The man who knows a trade. This grafter often "squares" it, is apt to marry and remain honest. His former pals, who are still grafters, treat him kindly, for they know he is not a rat. They know, too, that he is a bright and intelligent man, and that it is well to keep on the right side of him. Such a man has often educated himself in stir, and, when he squares it, is apt to join a political club, and is called in by the leader to help out in an election, for he possesses some brains. The gun is apt to make him an occasional present, for he can help the grafter, in case of a fall, because of his connection with the politicians. This kind of "dead one" often keeps his friends the grafters, while in stir, next to the news in the city.

4. The gun who is *supposed* to square it. This grafter has got a bunch of money together

and sees a good chance to open a gin-mill, or a Raines Law hotel, or a gambling joint. He knows how to take care of the repeaters, and is handy about election time. In return he gets protection for his illegal business. He is a go-between, and is on good terms with coppers and grafters. He supplies the grafter who has plenty of fall-money with bondsmen, makes his life in the Tombs easy, and gets him a good job while in stir. This man is supposed to be "dead," but he is really very much alive. Often a copper comes to him and asks for the whereabouts of some grafter or other. He will reply, perhaps: "I hear he is in Europe, or in the West." The copper looks wise and imagines he is clever. The "dead" one sneers, and, like a wise man, laughs in his sleeve; for he is generally in communication with the man looked for.

5. The sure-thing grafter. He is a man who continues to steal, but wants above everything to keep out of stir, where he has spent many years. So he goes back to the petty pilfering he did as a boy. General Brace and the Professor belonged to this class of "dead ones." The second night I spent on the Bowery after my return from my second bit I

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

met Laudanum Joe, who is another good example of this kind of "dead one." At one time he made thousands of dollars, but now he is discouraged and nervous. He looked bad (poorly dressed) but was glad to see me.

"How is graft?" he asked.

"I have left the Rocky Path," I replied, thinking I would throw a few "cons" into him. "I am walking straight. Not in the religious line, either."

He smiled, which was tantamount to saying that I lied.

"What are you working at?" he asked.

"I am looking for a job," I replied.

"Jimmy, is it true, that you are pipes (crazy)? I heard you got buggy (crazy) in your last bit."

"Joe," I replied, "you know I was never bothered above the ears."

"If you are going to carry the hod," he said, you might as well go to the pipe-house, and let them cure you. Have you given up smoking, too?" he continued.

He meant the hop. I conned him again and said: "Yes." He showed the old peculiar, familiar grin, and said:



*On the Outside Again.*

"Say, I have no coin. Take me with you and give me a smoke."

I tried to convince him that there was nothing in it, but he was a doubter.

"What are *you* doing, Joe?" I asked.

"O, just getting a few shillings, he replied, meaning that he was grafting."

"Why don't you give up the booze?" I asked.

I had made a break, for he said, quickly :

"Why? Because I don't wear a Piccadilly collar?"

All grafters of any original calibre are super-sensitive, to a point very near insanity. Laudanum Joe thought I had reference to his dress, which was very bum.

"Joe," I said, "I never judge a man by his clothes, especially one that I know."

"Jimmy," he said, "the truth is I can't stand another long bit in stir. I do a little petty pilfering that satisfies my wants—a cup of tea, plenty of booze, and a little hop. If I fall I only go to the workhouse for a couple of months. The screws know I have seen better days and I can get a graft and my booze while there. If I aint as prosperous as I was once, why not dream I'm a millionaire?"

## *The Autobiography of a Thief.*

Some grafters who have been prosperous at one time fall even lower than Laudanum Joe. When they get fear knocked into them and can't do without whiskey they sink lower and lower. Hungry Bob is another example. I grafted with him as a boy, but when I met him on the Bowery after my second bit I hardly knew him, and at first he failed to recognize me entirely. I got him into a gin-mill, however, and he told how badly treated he had been just before we met. He had gone into a saloon kept by an old pal of his who had risen in the world, and asked him for fifteen cents to buy a bed in a lodging-house. "Go long, you pan-handler (beggar)," said his old friend. Poor Bob was badly cut up about it, and talked about ingratitude for a long time. But he had his lodging money, for a safe-cracker who knew Hungry Bob when he was one of the gayest grafters in town, happened to be in the saloon, and he gave the "bum" fifteen cents for old times sake.

"How is it, Bob," I said to him, "that you are not so good as you were?"

"You want to know what put me on the bum?" he answered. "Well, it's this way. I can't trust nobody, and I have to graft alone.

*On the Outside Again.*

That's one thing. Then, too, I like the booze too much, and when I'm sitting down I can't get up and go out and hustle the way I used to."

Hungry Bob and I were sitting in a resort for sailors and hard-luck grafters in the lower Bowery, when a Sheenie I knew came in.

"Hello, Jim," he said.

"How's graft, Mike?" I replied.

"Don't mention it."

"What makes you look so glum?"

"I'm only after being turned out of police court this morning."

"What was the rap, Mike?"

"I'm looking too respectable. They asked me where I got the clothes. I told them I was working, which was true. I have been a waiter for three months. The flymen took me to headquarters. I was gathered in to make a reputation for those two shoo-flies. Whenever I square it and go to work I am nailed regularly, because my mug is in the Hall of Fame. When I am arrested, I lose my job every time. Nobody knows you now, Jim. You could tear the town open."

I made a mental resolution to follow Mike's advice very soon—as soon as my health was a

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

little better. Just then Jack, a boyhood pal of mine, who knew the old girls, Sheenie Annie and the rest, came in. I was mighty glad to see him, and said so to him.

"I guess you've got the advantage of me, bloke," was his reply.

"Don't you remember Jimmy the Kid, ten years ago, in the sixth?" I jogged his memory with the names of a few pals of years ago, and when he got next, he said :

"I wouldn't have known you, Jim. I thought you were dead many years ago in stir. I heard it time and time again. I thought you were past and gone."

After a short talk, I said :

"Where's Sheenie Annie?"

"Dead," he replied.

"Mamie?" I asked.

"Dead," he replied.

"Lucy?"

"In stir."

"Swedish Emmy?"

"She's married."

"Any good Molls now? I'm only after getting back from stir and am not next," I said.

"T'aint like old times, Jim," he said. "The Molls won't steal now. They aint got brains

*On the Outside Again.*

enough. They are not innocent. They are ignorant. All they know how to do is the badger."

I went with Jack to his house, where he had an opium layout. There we found several girls and grafters, some smoking hop, some with the subtle cigarette between their lips. I was introduced to an English grafter, named Harry. He said he was bloomin' glad to see me. He was just back from the West, he said, but I thought it was the pen. He began to abuse the States, and I said :

"You duffer, did you ever see such pretty girls as here? Did you ever wear a collar and tie in the old country?"

He grew indignant and shouted: "'Oly Cobblestones! In this —— country I have two hundred bucks (dollars) saved up every time, but I never spend a cent of it. 'Ow to 'Ell am I better off here? I'm only stealin' for certain mugs (policemen) and fer those 'igher up, so they can buy real estate. They enjoy their life in this country and Europe off my 'ard earned money and the likes of me. They die as respected citizens. I die in the work'us as an outcast. Don't be prating about your —— country!"

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

As soon as I had picked out a good mob to join I began to graft again. Two of my new pals were safe-blowers, and we did that graft, and day-work, as well as the old reliable dipping. But I wasn't much at the graft during the seven months I remained on the outside. My health continued bad, and I did not feel like "jumping out" so much as I had done formerly. I did not graft except when my funds were very low, and so, of course, contrary to my plans, I saved no fall-money. I had a girl, an opium lay-out and a furnished room, where I used to stay most of the time, smoking with pals, who, like myself, had had the keen edge of their ambition taken off. I had a strange longing for music at that time; I suppose because my nerves were weaker than they used to be. I kept a number of musical instruments in my room, and used to sing and dance to amuse my visitors.

During these seven months that I spent mainly in my room, I used to reflect and philosophize a lot, partly under the influence of opium. I would moralize to my girl or to a friend, or commune with my own thoughts. I often got in a state of mind where everything seemed a joke to me. I often thought

of myself as a spectator watching the play of life. I observed my visitors and their characteristics and after they had left for the evening loved to size them up in words for Lizzie.

My eyes were so bad that I did not read much, but I took it out in epigrams and wise sayings. I will give a few specimens of the kind of philosophy I indulged in.

"You always ought to end a speech with a sneer or a laconic remark. It is food for thought. The listener will pause and reflect."

"It is not what you make, but what you save, that counts. It isn't the big cracksman who gets along. It is the unknown dip who saves his earnings."

"To go to Germany to learn the language is as bad as being in stir for ten years."

"Jump out and be a man and don't join the Salvation Army."

"Always say to the dip who says he wants to square it; Well, what's your other graft?"

"When a con gets home he is apt to find his sweetheart married, and a 'Madonna of the wash tubs.'"

"He made good money and was a swell grafter, but he got stuck on a Tommy that

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

absorbed his attention, and then he lost his punctuality and went down and out."

"Do a criminal a bodily injury and he may forget. Wound his feelings and he will never forgive."

"Most persons have seen a cow or a bull with a board put around its head in such a way that the animal can see nothing. It is a mode of punishment. Soon the poor beast will go mad, if the board is not removed. What chance has the convict, confined in a dark cell for years, to keep his senses? He suffers from astigmatism of the mind."

"I am as much entitled to an opinion as any other quack on the face of the earth."

"General Grant is one of my heroes. He was a boy at fifteen. He was a boy when he died. A boy is loyalty personified. General Grant had been given a task to do, and like a boy, he did it. He was one of our greatest men, and belongs with Tom Paine, Benjamin Franklin and Robert Ingersoll."

"Why don't we like the books we liked when we were boys? It is not because our judgment is better, but because we have a dream of our own now, and want authors to dream along the same lines."



*On the Outside Again.*

"The only gun with principles is the minor grafter."

"The weakest man in the universe is he who falls from a good position and respectable society into the world of graft. Forgers and defaulters are generally of this class. A professional gun, who has been a thief all his life, is entitled to more respect."

"In writing a book on crime, one ought to have in mind to give the public a truthful account of a thief's life, his crimes, habits, thoughts, emotions, vices and virtues, and how he lives in prison and out. I believe this ought to be done, and the man who does it well must season his writings with pathos, humor, sarcasm, tragedy, and thus give the real life of the grafter."

"Sympathy with a grafter who is trying to square it is a tonic to his better self."

"The other day I was with a reporter and a society lady who were seeing the town. The lady asked me how I would get her diamond pin. It was fastened in such a way that to get it, strong arm work would be necessary. I explained how I would "put the mug on her" while my husky pal went through her. 'But,' she said, 'that would hurt me.' As if the

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

grafters cared ! What a selfish lady to be always thinking of herself ! ”

“ Life is the basis of philosophy. Philosophy is an emanation from our daily routine. After a convict has paced his cell a few thousand times he sometimes has an idea. Philosophy results from life put through a mental process, just as opium, when subjected to a chemical experiment, produces laudanum. Why, therefore, is not life far stronger than a narcotic ? ”

“ I believe in platonic love, for it has been in my own life. A woman always wants love, whether she is eighteen or eighty—real love. Many is the time I have seen the wistful look in some woman’s eye when she saw that it was only good fellowship or desire on my part.”

“ In this age of commerce there is only one true friendship, the kind that comes through business.”

“ An old adage has it that all things come to him who waits. Yes : poverty, old age and death. The successful man is he who goes and gets it.”

“ If thy brother assaults you, do not weep, nor pray for him, nor turn the other cheek, but assail him with the full strength of your

*On the Outside Again.*

muscles, for man at his best is not lovable, nor at his worst, detestable."

"There is more to be got in Germany, judging from what Dutch Lonzo used to say, than in England or America, only the Dutchmen are too thick-headed to find it out. A first class gun in Germany would be ranked as a ninth-rater here."

"Grafters are like the rest of the world in this: they always attribute bad motives to a kind act."

"From flim-flam (returning short change) to burglary is but a step, provided one has the nerve."

"Why would a woman take to him (a sober, respectable man but lacking in temperament) unless she wanted a good home?"

"If there is anything detestable, it is a grafter who will steal an overcoat in the winter time."

"'Look for the woman.' A fly-cop gets many a tip from some tid-bit in whom a grafter has reposed confidence."

I did not do, as I have said, any more grafting than was necessary during these seven months of liberty; but I observed continually,

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

living in an opium dream, and my pals were more and more amusing to me. When I thought about myself and my superior intelligence, I was sad, but I thought about myself as little as possible. I preferred to let my thoughts dwell on others, who I saw were a fine line of cranks and rogues.

Somewhere in the eighties, before I went to stir, there was a synagogue at what is now 101 Hester Street. The synagogue was on the first floor, and on the ground floor was a gin-mill, run by an ex-Central Office man. Many pickpockets used to hang out there, and they wanted to drive the Jews out of the first floor, so that they could lay out a faro game there. So they swore and carried on most horribly on Saturdays, when the rabbi was preaching, and finally got possession of the premises. Only a block away from this old building was a famous place for dips to get "books", in the old days. Near by was Ridley's dry-goods store, in which there were some cash-girls who used to tip us off to who had the books, and were up to the graft themselves. They would yell "cash" and bump up against the sucker, while we went through him. The Jews were few in those days, and the Irish

*On the Outside Again.*

were in the majority. On the corner of Allen and Hester Streets stood the saloon of a well-known politician. Now a Jew has a shop there. Who would think that an Isaacs would supersede a Finnigan?

At the gin-mill on Hester Street, I used to know a boy dip named Buck. When I got back from my second bit I found he had developed into a box-man, and had a peculiar disposition, which exists outside, as well as inside, Graftdom. He had one thousand eight hundred dollars in the bank, and a fine red front (gold watch and chain), but he was not a good fellow. He used to invite three or four guns to have a drink, and would order Hennessy's brandy, which cost twenty cents a glass. After we had had our drinks he would search himself and only find perhaps twenty cents in his clothes. He got into me several times before I "blew". One time, after he had ordered drinks, he began the old game, said he thought he had eighteen dollars with him, and must have been touched. Then he took out his gold watch and chain and threw it on the bar. But who would take it? I went down, of course, and paid for the drinks. When we went out together, he grinned, and

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

said to me: "I pity you. You will never have a bank account, my boy."

The next time Buck threw down his watch and said he would pay in the morning, I thought it was dirt, for I knew he had fifty dollars on him. So I said to the bartender: "Take it and hock it, and get what he owes you. This chump has been working it all up and down the line. I won't be touched by the d——grafter any more."

Buck was ready witted and turning to the bartender, said: "My friend here is learning how to play poker and has just lost eighteen dollars. He is a dead sore loser and is rattled."

We went out with the watch, without paying for our drinks, and he said to me: "Jim, I don't believe in paying a gin-mill keeper. If the powers that be were for the people instead of for themselves they would have such drinkables free on every corner in old New York." The next time Buck asked me to have a drink I told him to go to a warm place in the next world. Buck was good to his family. He was married and had a couple of brats.

Many a man educates himself in stir, as was

*On the Outside Again.*

my case. Jimmy, whom I ran up against one day on the street, is a good example. He had squared it and is still on the level. When I saw him, after my second bit, he was making forty dollars a week as an electrical engineer ; and every bit of the necessary education he got in prison. At one time he was an unusually desperate grafter ; and entirely ignorant of everything, except the technique of theft. Many years ago he robbed a jewelry store and was sent to Blackwell's Island for two years. The night of the day he was released he burglarized the same store and assaulted the proprietor. He was arrested with the goods on him and brought to General Sessions before Recorder Smythe, who had sentenced him before. He got ten years at Sing Sing and Auburn, and for a while he was one of the most dangerous and desperate of convicts, and made several attempts to escape. But one day a book on electricity fell into his hands, and from that time on he was a hard student. When he was released from stir he got a job in a large electrical plant up the State, and worked for a while, when he was tipped off by a country grafter who had known him in stir. He lost his job, and went to New

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

York, where he met me, who was home after my first term. I gave him the welcome hand, and, after he had told me his story, I said: "Well, there is plenty of money in town. Jump out with us." He grafted with me and my mob for a while, but got stuck on a Tommy, so that we could not depend on him to keep his appointments, and we dropped him. After that he did some strong arm work with a couple of gorillas and fell again for five years. When he returned from stir he got his present position as electrical engineer. He had it when I met him after my second bit and he has it to-day. I am sure he is on the level and will be so as long as he holds his job.

About this time I was introduced to a peculiar character in the shape of a few yards of calico. It was at Carey's place on Bleeker Street that I first saw this good-looking youth of nineteen, dressed in the latest fashion. His graft was to masquerade as a young girl, and for a long time Short-Haired Liz, as we called him, was very successful. He sought employment as maid in well-to-do families and then made away with the valuables. One day he was nailed, with twenty charges against



*On the Outside Again.*

him. He was convicted on the testimony of a chamber-maid, with whom, in his character of lady's maid, he had had a lark. Mr. R——, who was still influential, did his best for him, for his fall-money was big, and he only got a light sentence.

I heard one day that an old pal of mine, Dannie, had just been hanged. It gave me a shock, for I had often grafted with him when we were kids. As there were no orchards on the streets of the east side, Dannie and I used to go to the improvised gardens that lined the side-walks outside of the green grocers' shops, and make away with strawberries, apples, and other fruits. By nature I suppose boys are no more bothered with consciences than are police officials. Dannie rose rapidly in the world of graft and became very dangerous to society. As a grafter he had one great fault. He had a very quick temper. He was sensitive, and lacking in self-control, but he was one of the cleverest guns that ever came from the Sixth Ward, a place noted for good grafters of both sexes. He married a respectable girl and had a nice home, for he had enough money to keep the police from bothering him. If it had not been for his bad temper, he

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

might be grafting yet. He would shoot at a moment's notice, and the toughest of the hard element were afraid of him. One time he had it in for an old pal of his named Paddy. For a while Paddy kept away from the saloon on Pell Street where Dannie hung out, but Paddy, too, had nerve, and one day he turned up at his old resort, the Drum, as it was called. He saw Dannie and fired a cannister at him. Dannie hovered between life and death for months, and had four operations performed on him without anæsthetics. After he got well Dannie grafted on the Albany boats. One night he and his pals tried to get a Moll's leather, but some Western guns who were on the boat were looking for provender themselves and nicked the Moll. Dannie accused them of taking his property, and, as they would not give up, pulled his pistol. One of the Western guns jumped overboard, and the others gave up the stuff. Dannie was right, for that boat belonged to him and his mob.

A few months after that event Dannie shot a mug, who had called him a rat, and went to San Antonio, Texas, where he secured a position as bartender. One day a well-known gambler who had the reputation of being a

*On the Outside Again.*

ten time killer began to shoot around in the saloon for fun. Dannie joined in the game, shot the gambler twice, and beat the latter's two pals into insensibility. A few months afterwards he came to New York with twenty-seven hundred dollars in his pocket; and he enjoyed himself, for it is only the New York City born who love the town. But he had better have stayed away, for in New York he met his mortal enemy, Splitty, who had more brains than Dannie, and was running a "short while house" in the famous gas house block in Hester Street. One night Dannie was on a drunk, spending his twenty-seven hundred dollars, and riding around in a carriage with two girls. Beeze, one of the Molls, proposed to go around to Splitty's. They went, and Beeze and the other girl were admitted, but Dannie was shut out. He fired three shots through the door. One took effect in Beeze's breast fatally, and Dannie was arrested.

While in Tombs waiting trial he was well treated by the warden, who was leader of the Sixth Ward, and who used to permit Dannie's wife to visit him every night. At the same time Dannie became the victim of one of the worst cases of treachery I ever heard of. An

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

old pal of his, George, released from Sing Sing, went to visit him in the Tombs. Dannie advised George not to graft again until he got his health back, suggesting that meanwhile he eat his meals at his (Dannie's) mother's house. The old lady had saved up about two hundred and fifty dollars, which she intended to use to secure a new trial for her son. George heard of the money and put up a scheme to get it. He told the old woman that Dannie was going to escape from the Tombs that night and that he had sent word to his mother to give him (George) the money. The villain then took the money and skipped the city, thus completing the dirtiest piece of work I ever heard of. "Good Heavens!" said Dannie, when he heard of it. "A study in black!" Dannie, poor fellow, was convicted, and, after a few months, hanged.

Another tragedy in Manhattan was the end of Johnny T——. I had been out only a short time after my second bit, when I met him on the Bowery. He was just back, too, and complained that all his old pals had lost their nerve. Whenever he made a proposition they seemed to see twenty years staring them in the face. So he had to work alone. His

*On the Outside Again.*

graft was burglary, outside of New York. He lived in the city, and the police gave him protection for outside work. He was married and had two fine boys. One day a copper, contrary to the agreement, tried to arrest him for a touch made in Mt. Vernon. Johnny was indignant, and wouldn't stand for a collar under the circumstances. He put four shots into the flyman's body. He was taken to the station-house, and afterwards tried for murder. The boys collected a lot of money and tried to save him, but he had the whole police force against him and in a few months he was hanged.

A friend of mine, L——, had a similar fate. He was a prime favorite with the lasses of easy virtue, and was liked by the guns. One night when I met him in a joint where grafters hung out, he displayed a split lip, given him by the biggest bully in the ward. It was all about a girl named Mollie whom the bully was stuck on and on whose account he was jealous of L——, whom all the women ran after. A few nights later, L—— met the bully who had beaten him and said he had a present for him. "Is it something good?" asked the gorilla. "Yes," said L——, and shot him dead. L——

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

tried to escape, but was caught in Pittsburg, and extradited to New York, where he was convicted partly on the testimony of the girl, whom I used to call Unlimited Mollie. She was lucky, for instead of drifting to the Bowery, she married a policeman, who was promoted. L—— was sentenced to be hanged, but he died game.

I think kleptomania is not a very common kind of insanity, at least in my experience. Most grafters steal for professional reasons, but Big Sammy was surely a kleptomaniac. He had no reason to graft, for he was well up in the world. When I first met he was standard bearer at a ball given in his honor, and had a club named after him. He had been gin-mill keeper, hotel proprietor, and theatrical manager, and had saved money. He had, too, a real romance in his life, for he loved one of the best choir singers in the city. She was beautiful and loved him, and they were married. She did not know that Sammy was a gun; indeed, he was not a gun, really, for he only used to graft for excitement, or at least, what business there was in it was only a side issue. After their honeymoon Sammy started a hotel at a sea-side resort, where the better class of

*On the Outside Again.*

guns, gamblers and vaudeville artists spent their vacation. That fall he went on a tour with his wife who sang in many of the churches in the State. Sammy was a good box-man. He never used puff (nitro-glycerine), but with a few tools opened the safes artistically. His pal Mike went ahead of the touring couple, and when Sammy arrived at a town he was tipped off to where the goods lay. When he heard that the police were putting it on to the hoboos, he thought it was a good joke and kept it up. He wanted the police to gather in all the black sheep they could, for he was sorry they were so incompetent.

The loving couple returned to New York, and were happy for a long time. But finally the wife fell ill, and under-went an operation, from the effects of which she never recovered. She became despondent and jealous of Sammy, though he was one of the best husbands I have known. One morning he had an engagement to meet an old pal who was coming home from stir. He was late, and starting off in a hurry, neglected to kiss his wife good-bye. She called after him that he had forgotten something. Sammy, feeling for his money and cannister, shouted back that everything

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

was all right, and rushed off. His wife must have been in an unusually gloomy state of mind, for she took poison, and when Sammy returned, she was dead. It drove Sammy almost insane, for he loved her always. A few days afterwards he jumped out for excitement and forgetfulness and was so reckless when he tried to make a touch that he was shot almost to pieces. He recovered, however, and was sent to prison for a long term of years. He is out again, and is now regularly on the turf. During his bit in stir all his legitimate enterprizes went wrong, and when he was released, there was nothing for it but to become a professional grafter.

During the seven months which elapsed between the end of my second, and the beginning of my third term, I was not a very energetic grafter, as I have said. Graft was good at the time and a man with the least bit of nerve could make out fairly well. My nerve had not deserted me, but somehow I was less ambitious. Philosophy and opium and bad health do not incline a man to a hustling life. The excitement of stealing had left me, and now it was merely business. I therefore did a great deal of swindling, which does not stir



## *On the Outside Again.*

the imagination, but can be done more easily than other forms of graft. I was known at headquarters as a dip, and so I was not likely to be suspected for occasional swindling, just as I had been able to do house-work now and then without a fall.

I did some profitable swindling at this time, with an Italian named Velica for a pal. It was a kind of graft which brought quick returns without much of an outlay. For several weeks we fleeced Velica's country men brown. I impersonated a contractor and Velica was my foreman. We put advertisements in the newspapers for men to work on the railroads or for labor on new buildings. We hired desk room in a cheap office, where we awaited our suckers, who came in droves, though only one could see us at a time. Our tools for this graft were pen, paper, and ink; and one new shovel and pick-axe. Velica did the talking and I took down the man's name and address. Velica told his countryman that we could not afford to run the risk of disappointing the railroad, so that he would have to leave a deposit as a guarantee that he would turn up in the morning. If he left a deposit of a few dollars we put his name on the new

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

pick and shovel, which we told him he could come for in the morning. If we induced many to give us deposits, using the same pick and shovel as a bribe, we made a lot of money during the day. The next morning we would change our office and vary our form of advertisement.

Sometimes we met our victims at saloons. Velica would be talking to some Italian immigrant who had money, when I would turn up and be introduced. Treating all around and flashing a roll of bills I could soon win the sucker's respect and confidence, and make him ante up on any old con. One day in a saloon in Newark we got an Italian guy for one hundred and fifty dollars. Before he left the place, however, he suspected something. We had promised him the position of foreman of a gang of laborers, and after we got his dough we could not let well enough alone, and offered to give his wife the privilege of feeding the sixty Italians of whom he was to be the foreman. I suppose the dago thought that we were too good, for he blew and pulled his gun. I caught him around the waist, and the bartender, who was with us, struck him over the head with a bottle of beer. The dago

dropped the smoke-wagon and the bartender threatened to put him in prison for pulling a rod on respectable people. The dago left the saloon and never saw his money again.

About this time, too, I had an opportunity to go into still another lucrative kind of swindling, but didn't. It was not conscience either that prevented me from swindling the fair sex, for in those days all touches,—except those made by others off myself—seemed legitimate. I did not go in for it because, at the time it was proposed to me, I had enough money for my needs, and as I have said, I was lazy. It was a good graft, however, and I was a fool for not ringing in on it. The scheme was to hire a floor in a private house situated in any good neighborhood. One of the mob had to know German, and then an advertisement would be inserted in the *Herald* to the effect that a young German doctor who had just come from the old country wanted to meet a German lady of some means with a view to matrimony. A pal of mine who put such an advertisement in a Chicago paper received no less than one hundred and forty five answers from women ranging in age from fifteen to fifty. The grafters would read the letters and decide

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

as to which ladies they thought had some money. When these arrived at the office, in answer to the grafters' letters, they would meet two or three men, impersonating the doctor and his friends, who had the gift of "con" to a remarkable degree. The doctor would suggest that if the lady would advance sufficient money to start him in business in the West it would be well. If he found she had plenty of money he married her immediately, one of his pals acting the clergyman. She then drew all her money from the bank, and they went to a hotel. There the doctor leaving her in their room, would go to see about the tickets for the West, and never return. The ladies always jumped at these offers, for all German women want to marry doctors or clergymen; and all women are soft, even if they are so apt to be natural pilferers themselves.

When I was hard up, and if there was no good confidence game in sight, I didn't mind taking heavy chances in straight grafting; for I lived in a dream, and through opium, was not only lazy, but reckless. On one occasion a Jew fence had put up a plan to get a big touch, and picked me out to do the desperate

*On the Outside Again.*

part of the job. The fence was an expert in jewels and worked for one of the biggest firms that dealt in precious stones. He kept an eye on all such stores, watching for an opening to put his friends the grafters "next." To the place in question he was tipped off by a couple of penny weighters, who claimed it was a snap. He agreed with them, but kept his opinion to himself, and came to see me about it. I and two other grafters watched the place for a week. One day the two clerks went out together for lunch, leaving the proprietor alone in the store. This was the opportunity. I stationed one of my pals at the window outside and the other up the street to watch. If I had much trouble with "the mark" the pal at the window was to come to my assistance. With red pepper (to throw, if necessary, in the sucker's eyes) and a good black jack I was to go into the store and buy a baby's ring for one dollar. While waiting for my change, I was to price a piece of costly jewelry, and while talking about the merits of the diamond, hit my man on the head with the black jack. Then all I had to do was to go behind the counter and take the entire contents of the window—only a minute's

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

work, for all the costly jewels were lying on an embroidered piece of velvet, and I had only to pick up the four corners of the velvet, bundle it into a green bag, and jump into the cab which was waiting for us a block away. Well, I had just about got the proprietor in a position to deal him the blow when the man at the window weakened, and came in and said, "Vix." I thought there was a copper outside, or that one of the clerks was returning, and told the jeweler I would send my wife for the ring. I went out and asked my pal what was the matter. He said he was afraid I would kill the old fellow, and that the come-back would be too strong. My other pal I found a block away. We all went back together to the fence, and then I opened on them, I tell you. I called them petty larceny barnacles, and came near clubbing them, I was so indignant. I have often had occasion to notice that most thieves who will steal a diamond or a "front" weaken when it comes to a large touch, even though there may be no more danger in it than in the smaller enterprises. I gave those two men a wide berth after that, and whenever I met them I sneered; for I could not get over being sore. The "touch"

*On the Outside Again.*

was a beauty, with very little chance of a come-back, for the police don't look among the pickpockets for the men who make this kind of touches, and I and my two companions were known to the coppers as dips.

Just before I fell for my third and most terrible term, I met Lottie, and thought of marrying. I did not love her, but liked her pretty well, and I was beginning to feel that I ought to settle down and have a decent woman to look after me, for my health was bad and I had little ambition. Lottie seemed the right girl for the place. She was of German extraction, and used to shave me sometimes at her father's barber shop, where I first met her. She seemed to me a good, honest girl, and I thought I could not do better, especially as she was very fond of me. Women like the spruce dips, as I have said before, and even when my graft had broadened, I always retained the dress, manners and reputation of a pickpocket. Lottie promised to marry me, and said that she could raise a few hundred dollars from her father, with which I might start another barber shop, quit grafting, and settle down to my books, my hop and domestic life. One day she gave me a pin that cost nine dol-

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

lars, she said, and she wouldn't let me make her a present. All in all, she seemed like a sensible girl, and I was getting interested in the marriage idea. One day, however, I discovered something. I was playing poker in the office of a hotel kept by a friend of mine, when a man and woman came down stairs together and passed through the office. They were my little German girl and the owner of a pawn-shop, a Sheenie of advanced years. Suddenly I realized where she had got the pin she gave me ; and I began to believe stories I had heard about her. I thought I would test her character myself. I did, and found it weak. I did not marry her ! What an escape ! Every man, even a self-respecting gun, wants an honest woman, if it comes to hitching up for good.

Soon after I escaped Lottie, I got my third fall for the stir. The other times that I had been convicted, I was guilty, but on this occasion I was entirely innocent. Often a man who has done time and is well-known to the police is rounded up on suspicion and convicted when he is innocent, and I fell a victim to this easy way of the officials for covering up their failure to find the right person. I had gone



*On the Outside Again.*

one night to an opium joint near Lover's Row, a section of Henry Street between Catherine and Oliver Streets, where some guns of both sexes were to have a social meeting. We smoked hop and drank heavily and told stories of our latest touches. While we were thus engaged I began to have severe pains in my chest, which had been bothering me occasionally for some time, and suddenly I had a hemorrhage. When I was able I left the joint to see a doctor, who stopped the flow of blood, but told me I would not live a month if I did not take good care of myself. I got aboard a car, went soberly home to my furnished room, and—was arrested.

I knew I had not committed any crime this time and thought I should of course be released in the morning. Instead however of being taken directly to the station house, I was conducted to a saloon, and confronted with the "sucker". I had never seen him before, but he identified me, just the same, as the man who had picked his pocket. I asked him how long ago he had missed his valuables, and when he answered, "Three hours," I drew a long sigh of relief, for I was at the joint at that time, and thought I could prove an alibi. But though

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

the rapper seemed to weaken, the copper was less trustful and read the riot act to him. I was so indignant I began to call the policeman down vigorously. I told him he had better try to make a reputation on me some other time, when I was really guilty, whereupon he lost his temper, and jabbed me in the chest with his club, which brought on another flow of blood from my lungs.

In this plight I was taken to the station house, still confident I should soon be set at liberty, although I had only about eighty dollars for fall-money. I hardly thought I needed it, but I used it just the same, to make sure, and employed a lawyer. For a while things looked favorable to me, for I was remanded back from court every morning for eight days, on account of lack of evidence, which is almost equivalent to a turn-out in a larceny case. Even the copper began to pig it (weaken), probably thinking he might as well get a share of my "dough," since it began to look as if I should beat the case. But on the ninth day luck turned against me. The Chief of detectives "identified" me as another man, whispering a few words to the justice, and I was committed under two thousand

dollars bail to stand trial in General Sessions. I was sent to the Tombs to await trial, and I knew at last that I was lost. My character alone would convict me; and my lawyer had told me that I could not prove an alibi on the oaths of the thieves and disorderly persons who had been with me in the opium joint.

No matter how confirmed a thief a man may be, I repeat, he hates to be convicted for something he has not done. He objects indeed more than an honest man would do, for he believes in having the other side play fair; whereas the honest man simply thinks a mistake has been made. While in the Tombs a murderous idea formed in my mind. I felt that I had been horribly wronged, and was hot for revenge. I was desperate, too, for I did not think I should live my bit out. Determined to make half a dozen angels, including myself, I induced a friend, who came to see me in the Tombs, to get me a revolver. I told him I wanted to create a panic with a couple of shots, and escape, but in reality I had no thought of escape. I was offered a light sentence, if I would plead guilty, but I refused. I believed I was going to die anyway, and that things did not matter; only I

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

would have as much company as possible on the road to the other world. I meant to shoot the copper who had beaten me with his club, District Attorney Olcott, the judge, the complainant and myself as well, as soon as I should be taken into the court room for trial. The pistol however was taken away from me before I entered the court: I was convicted and sentenced to five years at Sing Sing.

Much of the time I spent in stir on my third bit I still harbored this thought of murder. That was one reason I did not kill myself. The determination to do the copper on my release was always in my mind. I planned even a more cunning revenge. I imagined many a scheme to get him, and gloat over his dire misfortunes. One of my plans was to hunt him out on his beat, invite him to drink, and put thirty grains of hydrate of chloral in his glass. When he had become unconscious I would put a bottle of morphine in his trousers pocket, and then telephone to a few newspapers telling them that if they would send reporters to the saloon they would have a good story against a dope copper who smoked too much. The result would be, I thought, a rap against the copper and his disgrace and

*On the Outside Again.*

dismissal from the force would follow. Sometimes this seemed to me better than murder ; for every copper who is " broke " immediately becomes a bum. When my copper should have become a bum I imagined myself catching him dead drunk and cutting his hamstrings. Certainly I was a fiend when I reflected on my wrongs, real and imaginary. At other times I thought I merely killed him outright.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### *In the Mad-House.*

ON the road to Sing Sing again! The public may say I was surely an incorrigible and ought to have been shut up anyway for safe keeping, but are they right if they say so? During my confinement I often heard the prison chaplain preach from the text "Though thou sinnest ninety and nine times thy sin shall be forgiven thee."

Probably Christ knew what He meant: His words do not apply to the police courts of Manhattan. These do not forgive, but send you up for the third term, which, if it is a long one, no man can pass through without impairment in body or in brain. It is better to make the convict's life as hard as hell for a short term, than to wear out his mind and body. People need not wonder why a man, knowing what is before him, steals and steals again. The painful experiences of his prison life, too often renewed, leave him as water leaves a rubber coat. Few men are really

impressionable after going through the deadening life in stir.

Five months of my third term I spent at Sing Sing, and then, as on my first bit, I was drafted to Auburn. At Sing Sing I was classified as a second term man. I have already explained that during my first term I earned over a year's commutation time; and that that time would have been legally forfeited when I was sent up again within nine months for my second bit if any one, except a few convicts, had remembered I had served before.

When, on my third sentence, I now returned to Sing Sing, I found that the authorities were "next," and knew that I had "done" them on the second bit. They were sore, because it had been their own carelessness, and they were afraid of getting into trouble. To protect themselves they classified me as a second term man, but waited for a chance to do me. I suppose it was some d—— Dickey Bird (stool-pigeon) who got them next that I had done them; but I never heard who it was, though I tried to find out long and earnestly.

When I got back to my cell in Sing Sing this third time I was gloomy and desperate to an unusual degree, still eaten up with my desire for

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

vengeance on those who had sent me to stir for a crime I had not committed. My health was so bad that my friends told me I would never live my bit out, and advised me to get to Clinton prison, if possible, away from the damp cells at Sing Sing. But I took no interest in what they said, for I did not care whether I lived or died. I expected to die very soon, and in the meantime thought I was well enough where I was. I did not fear death, and I had my hop every day. All I wanted from the keepers was to be let alone in my cell and not annoyed with work. The authorities had an inkling that I was in a desperate state of mind, and probably believed it was healthier for them to let me alone a good deal of the time.

Before long schemes began to form in my head to make my gets (escape). I knew I wouldn't stop at murder, if necessary in order to spring; for, as I have said, I cared not whether I lived or died. On the whole, however, I rather preferred to become an angel at the beginning of my bit than at the end. I kept my schemes for escape to myself, for I was afraid of a leak, but the authorities must somehow have suspected something, for they



kept me in my cell twenty-three hours out of the twenty-four. Perhaps it was just because they had it in for me for beating them on my second bit. As before, I consoled myself, while waiting a chance to escape, with some of my favorite authors; but my eye-sight was getting bad and I could not read as much as I used to.

It was during these five months at Sing Sing that I first met Dr. Myers, of whom I saw much a year or two later in the mad-house. At Sing Sing he had some privileges, and used to work in the hall, where it was easy for me to talk to him through my cell door. This remarkable man, had been a splendid physician in Chicago. He had beaten some insurance companies out of one hundred and sixty-five thousand dollars, but was in Sing Sing because he had been wrongfully convicted on a charge of murder. He liked me, especially when later we were in the insane asylum together, because I would not stand for the abuse given to the poor lunatics, and would do no stool-pigeon or other dirty work for the keepers. He used to tell me that I was too bright a man to do any work with my hands. "Jim," he said once, "I would rather

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

see you marry my daughter than give her to an ignorant business man. I know you would treat her kindly and that she would learn something of the world. As my wife often said, I would rather die at thirty-eight after seeing the world and enjoying life than live in a humdrum way till ninety."

He explained the insurance graft to me, and I still think it the surest and most lucrative of all grafts. For a man with intelligence it is the very best kind of crooked work. About the only way the insurance companies can get back at the thieves is through a squeal. Here are a few of the schemes he told me for this graft :

A man and his female pal take a small house in town or on the outskirts of a large city. The man insures his life for five thousand dollars. After they have lived there a while, and passed perhaps as music teachers, they take the next step, which is to get a dead body. Nothing is easier. The man goes to any large hospital, represents himself as a doctor and for twenty-five dollars can generally get a stiff, which he takes away in a barrel or trunk. He goes to a furnished room, already secured, and there dresses the cadaver

in his own clothes, putting his watch, letters and money in the cadaver's pockets. In the evening he takes the body to some river or stream and throws it in. He knows from the newspapers when the body has been found, and notifies his woman pal, who identifies it as her husband's body. There are only two snags that one must guard against in this plot. The cadaver must not differ much in height from the person that has been insured; and its lungs must not show that they were those of anybody dead before thrown into the water. The way to prepare against this danger is to inject some water with a small medical pump into the lungs of the stiff before it is thrown overboard. Then it is easy for the "widow" to get the money, and meet the alleged dead man in another country.

A more complicated method, in which more money is involved, is as follows. The grafter hires an office and represents himself as an artist, a bric-à-brac dealer, a promoter or an architect. Then he jumps to another city and takes out a policy under the tontien or endowment plan. When the game is for a very large amount three or four pals are necessary. If no one of the grafters is a doctor, a phy-

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

sician must be impersonated, but this is easy. If there are, say, ten thousand physicians in Manhattan, not many of whom have an income of ten thousand a year, it is perhaps not difficult to get a diploma. After a sheepskin is secured, the grafter goes to another State, avoiding, unless he is a genuine physician, New York and Illinois, for they have boards of regents. The acting quack registers so that he can practice medicine and hangs out his shingle. The acting business man takes out a policy, and pays the first premium. Before the first premium is paid he is dead, for all the insurance company knows. Often a live substitute, instead of a dead one, is secured. The grafter goes to the charity hospital and looks over the wrecks waiting to die. Some of these poor dying devils jump at the chance to go West. It is necessary, of course, to make sure that the patient will soon become an angel, or everything will fall through. Then the grafter takes the sick man to his house and keeps him out of sight. When he is about to die he calls in the grafter who is posing as a physician. After the death of the substitute the doctor signs the death certificate, the undertaker prepares the body,

which is buried. The woman grafter is at the funeral, and afterwards she sends in her claim to the companies. On one occasion in Dr. Myers's experience, he told me, the alleged insured man was found later with his head blown off, but when the wife identified the body, the claim had been paid.

One afternoon, after I had been at Sing Sing five months, I was taken from my cell, shackled hand and foot, and sent, with fifty other convicts, to Auburn. When I had been at Auburn prison about six months I grew again exceedingly desperate, and made several wild and ill-thought-out attempts to escape. I would take no back talk from the keepers, and began to be feared by them. One day I had a fight with another convict. He struck me with an iron weapon, and I sent him to the hospital with knife thrusts through several parts of his body. Although I had been a thief all my life, and had done some strong arm work, by nature I was not quarrelsome, and I have never been so quick to fight as on my third term. I was locked up in the dungeon for a week and fed on bread and water in small quantities. After my release I was con-

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

fined to my cell for several days, and used to quarrel with whoever came near me. The keepers began to regard me as a desperate character, who would cause them a great deal of trouble; and feared that I might escape or commit murder at any time. One day, I remember, a keeper threatened to club me with a heavy stick he had. I laughed at him and told him to make a good job of it, for I had some years still to serve, and if he did not kill me outright, I would have plenty of time to get back at him. The cur pigged it (weakened). They really wanted to get rid of me, however, and one morning the opportunity came.

I was feeling especially bad that morning and went to see the doctor, who told me I had consumption, and transferred me to the consumptive ward in the prison. There the doctor and four screws came to my bedside, and the doctor inserted a hyperdermic needle into my arm. When I awoke I found myself in the isolated dungeon, nicknamed the Keeley Cure by the convicts, where I was confined again for several weeks, and had a hyperdermic injection every day. At the end of that time I was taken before the doctors, who pro-

*In the Mad-House.*

nounced me insane. With three other convicts who were said to be "pipes" (insane) I was shackled hand and foot, put on a train and taken to the asylum for the criminal insane at Matteawan. I had been in bad places before, but at Matteawan I first learned what it is to be in Hell.

Why was I put in the Pipe House? Was I insane?

In one way I have been insane all my life, until recently. There is a disease called astigmatism of the conscience, and I have been sorely afflicted with that. I have always had the delusion, until the last few months, that it is well to "do" others. In that way I certainly was "pipes." And in another way, too, I was insane. After a man has served many years in stir and has contracted all the vices, he is not normal, even if he is not violently insane. His brain loses its equilibrium, no matter how strong-minded he may be, and he acquires astigmatism of the mind, as well as of the conscience. The more astigmatic he becomes, the more frequently he returns to stir, where his disease grows worse, until he is prison-mad.

To the best of my knowledge and belief I was not insane in any definite way—no more

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

so than are nine out of ten of the men who had served as much time in prison as I. I suppose I was not sent to the criminal insane asylum because of a perverted conscience. The stir, I believe, is supposed to cure that. Why did they send me to the mad-house? I don't know, any more than my reader, unless it was because I caused the keepers and doctors too much trouble, or because for some reason or other they wanted to do me.

But whether I had a delusion or not—and I am convinced myself that I have always been right above the ears—there certainly are many perfectly sane men confined in our state asylums for the criminal insane. Indeed, if all the fake lunatics were sent back to prison, it would save the state the expense of building so many hospitals. But I suppose the politicians who want patronage to distribute would object.

Many men in prison fake insanity, as I have already explained. Many of them desire to be sent to Matteawan or Dannemora insane asylums, thinking they will not need to work there, will have better food and can more easily escape. They imagine that there are no stool-pigeons in the pipe-house, and that



they can therefore easily make their elegant (escape). When they get to the mad-house they find themselves sadly mistaken. They find many sane stool-pigeons there, and their plans for escape are piped off as well there as in stir. And in other ways, as I shall explain, they are disappointed. The reason the "cons" don't get on to the situation in the mad-house through friends who have been there is that they think those who have been in the insane asylum are really pipes. When I got out of the mad-house and told my friends about it, they were apt to remark, laconically, "He's in a terrible state." When they get there themselves, God help them. I will narrate what happened to me, and some of the horrible things I saw there.

After my pedigree was taken I was given the regulation clothes, which, in the mad-house, consist of a blue coat, a pair of grey trousers, a calico shirt, socks and a pair of slippers. I was then taken to the worst violent ward in the institution, where I had a good chance to observe the real and the fake lunatics. No man or woman, not even an habitual criminal, can conceive, unless he has been there himself, what our state asylums are. My very

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

first experience was a jar. A big lunatic, six feet high and a giant in physique, came up to me in the ward, and said: "I'll kick your head off, you ijit (idiot). What the —— did you come here for? Why didn't you stop off at Buffalo?" I thought that if all the loons were the size of this one I wasn't going to have much show in that violent ward; for I weighed only one hundred and fifteen pounds at the time. But the big lunatic changed his note, smiled and said: "Say, Charley, have you got any marbles?" I said, "No," and then, quick as a flash, he exclaimed: "Be Japes, you don't look as if you had enough brains to play them."

I had been in this ward, which was under the Head Attendant, nick-named "King" Kelly, for two days, when I was taken away to a dark room in which a demented, scrofulous negro had been kept. For me not even a change of bed-clothing was made. In rooms on each side of me were epileptics and I could hear, especially when I was in the ward, raving maniacs shouting all about me. I was taken back to the first ward, where I stayed for some time. I began to think that prison was heaven in comparison with the pipe house. The food

*In the Mad-House.*

was poor, we were not supposed to do any work, and we were allowed only an hour in the yard. We stayed in our ward from half past five in the morning until six o'clock at night, when we went to bed. It was then I suffered most, for there was no light and I could not read. In stir I could lie on my cot and read, and soothe my nerves. But in the mad-house I was not allowed to read, and lay awake continually at night listening to the idiots bleating and the maniacs raving about me. The din was horrible, and I am convinced that in the course of time even a sane man kept in an insane asylum will be mad ; those who are a little delusional will go violently insane. My three years in an insane asylum convinced me that, beyond doubt, a man contracts a mental ailment just as he contracts a physical disease on the outside. I believe in mental as well as physical contagion, for I have seen man after man, a short time after arriving at the hospital, become a raving maniac.

For weeks and months I had a terrible fight with myself to keep my sanity. As I had no books to take up my thoughts I got into the habit of solving an arithmetical problem every day. If it had not been for my persistence in

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

this mental occupation I have no doubt I should have gone violently insane.

It is only the sensitive and intelligent man who, when placed in such a predicament, really knows what torture is. The cries of the poor demented wretches about me were a terrible lesson. They showed me more than any other experience I ever passed through the error of a crooked life.

I met many a man in the violent ward who had been a friend of mine and good fellow on the outside. Now the brains of all of them were gone, they had the most horrible and the most grotesque delusions. But horrible or grotesque they were always piteous. If I were to point out the greatest achievement that man has accomplished to distinguish him from the brute, it would be the taking care of the insane. A child is so helpless that when alms is asked for his maintenance it is given willingly, for every man and woman pities and loves a child. A lunatic is as helpless as a child, and often not any more dangerous. The maniac is misrepresented, for in Matteawan and Danemora taken together there are very few who are really violent.

And now I come to the most terrible part of

my narrative, which many people will not believe—and that is the cruelty of the doctors and attendants, cruelty practiced upon these poor, deluded wretches.

With my own eyes I saw scores of instances of abuse while I was at Matteawan and later at Dannemora. It is, I believe, against the law to strike an insane man, but any man who has ever been in these asylums knows how habitual the practice is. I have often seen idiots in the same ward with myself violently attacked and beaten by several keepers at once. Indeed, some of us used to regard a beating as our daily medicine. Patients are not supposed to do any work; but those who refused to clean up the wards and do other work for the attendants were the ones most likely to receive little mercy.

I know how difficult it is for the public to believe that some of their institutions are as rotten as those of the Middle Ages; and when a man who has been both in prison and in the pipe house is the one who makes the accusation, who will believe him? Of course, his testimony on the witness stand is worthless. I will merely call attention, however, to the fact that the great majority of the insane are

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

so only in one way. They have some delusion, but are otherwise capable of observation and of telling the truth. I will also add that the editor of this book collected an immense number of instances of brutality from several men, besides myself, who had spent years there, and that those instances also pointed to the situation that I describe. Moreover, I can quote the opinion of the writer on criminology—Josiah Flynt—as corroborative of my statements. He has said in my presence and in that of the editor of this book, Mr. Hapgood, that his researches have led him to believe that the situation in our state asylums for the criminal insane is horrible in the extreme.

Indeed, why shouldn't these attendants be brutal? In the first place, there is very little chance of a come-back, for who will believe men who have ever been shut up in an insane asylum? And very often these attendants themselves are unhinged mentally. To begin with, they are men of low intelligence, as is shown by the fact that they will work for eighteen dollars a month, and after they have associated with insane men for years they are apt to become delusional themselves. Taking care of idiots and maniacs is a strain on the

intelligence of the best men. Is it any wonder that the ordinary attendant often becomes nervous and irascible, and will fly at a poor idiot who won't do dirty work or whose silly noises get on his nerves? I have noticed attendants who, after they had been in the asylum a few months, acquired certain insane characteristics, such as a jerking of the head from one side to the other, looking up at the sky, cursing some imaginary person, and walking with the body bent almost double.

Early in my stay at Matteawan I saw something that made me realize I was up against a hard joint. An attendant in the isolation ward had an incurable patient under him, whom he was in the habit of compelling to do his work for him, such as caning chairs and cleaning cuspidors. The attendants had two birds in his room, and he used to make Mickey, the incurable idiot, clean out the cage for him. One day Mickey put the cages under the boiling water, to clean them as usual. The attendant had forgot to remove the birds, and they were killed by the hot water. Another crank, who was in the bath room with Mickey, spied the dead pets, and he and Mickey began to eat them. They

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

were picking the bones when the attendant and two others discovered them—and treated them as a golfer treats his golf-balls.

Another time I saw an insane epileptic patient try to prevent four attendants from playing cards in the ward on Sunday. He was delusional on religious subjects and thought the attendants were doing wrong. The reward he received for caring for the religious welfare of his keepers was a kick in the stomach by one of the attendants, while another hit him in the solar plexus, knocking him down, and a third jammed his head on the floor until the blood flowed. After he was unconscious a doctor gave him a hyperdermic injection and he was put to bed. How often, indeed, have I seen men knocked out by strong arm work, or strung up to the ceiling with a pair of suspenders! How often have I seen them knocked unconscious for a time or for eternity—yes—for eternity, for insane men sometimes do die, if they are treated too brutally. In that case, the doctor reports the patient as having died of consumption, or some other disease. I have seen insane men turned into incurable idiots by the beatings they have received from the attendants. I



saw an idiot boy knocked down with an iron pot because he insisted on chirping out his delusion. I heard a patient about to be beaten by four attendants cry out: "My God, you won't murder me?" and the answer was, "Why not? The Coroner would say you died of dysentery." The attendants tried often to force fear into me by making me look at the work they had done on some harmless lunatic. I could multiply instances of this kind. I could give scores of them, with names of attendants and patients, and sometimes even the dates on which these horrors occurred. But I must cut short this part of my narrative. Every word of it, as sure as I have a poor old mother, is true, but it is too terrible to dwell upon, and will probably not be believed. It will be put down as one of my delusions, or as a lie inspired by the desire of vengeance.

Certainly I made myself obnoxious to the authorities in the insane asylum, for I objected vigorously to the treatment of men really insane. It is as dangerous to object to the curriculum of a mad-house in the State of New York as it is to find fault with the running of the government in Russia. In stir I never

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

saw such brutality as takes place almost every day in the pipe house. I reported what I saw, and though I was plainly told to mind my own business, I continued to object every time I saw a chance, until soon the petty spite of the attendants was turned against me. I was reported continually for things I had not done, I had no privileges, not even opium or books, and was so miserable that I repeatedly tried to be transferred back to prison. A doctor once wrote a book called *Ten Years in a Mad-House*, in which he says "God help the man who has the attendants against him; for these demented brutes will make his life a living hell." Try as I might, however, I was not transferred back to stir, partly because of the sane stool-pigeons who, in order to curry favor with the attendants, invented lies about attempts on my part to escape. If I had not had such a poor opinion of the powers that be and had stopped finding fault I should no doubt have been transferred back to what was beginning to seem to me, by contrast, a delightful place—state's prison.

The all absorbing topic to me in the pipe house was paresis. I thought a great deal about it, and observed the cranks about me

continually. I noticed that almost all insane persons are musical, that they can hum a tune after hearing it only once. I suppose the meanest faculty in the human brain is that of memory, and that idiots, lunatics and mad-men learn music so easily because that part of the brain which is the seat of memory is the only one that is active; the other intellectual qualities being dead, so that the memory is untroubled by thought.

I was often saddened at the sight of poor George, who had been a good dip and an old pal of mine. When he first saw me in the pipe house he asked me about his girl. I told him she was still waiting, and he said: "Why doesn't she visit me then?" When I replied: "Wait awhile," he smiled sadly, and said: "I know." He then put his finger to his head, and, hanging his head, his face suddenly became a blank. I was helpless to do anything for him. I was so sorry for him sometimes that I wanted to kill him and myself and end our misery.

Another friend of mine thought he had a number of white blackbirds and used to talk to them excitedly about gold. This man had a finely shaped head. I have read in a book

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

of phrenology that a man's intelligence can be estimated by the shape of his head. I don't think this theory amounts to anything, for most of the insane men I knew had good heads. I have formed a little theory of my own (I am as good a quack as anybody else) about insanity. I used to compare a well shaped lunatic's head to a lady's beautiful jewel box from which my lady's maid had stolen the precious stones. The crank's head contained both quantity and quality of brains, but the grey matter was lacking. The jewel box and the lunatic's head were both beautiful receptacles, but the value had flown.

Another lunatic, a man named Hogan, thought that girls were continually bothering him. "Now go away, Liz, and leave me alone," he would say. One day a lady about fifty years old visited the hospital with Superintendent Allison, and came to the violent ward where Hogan and I were. She was not a bit afraid, and went right up to Hogan and questioned him. He exclaimed, excitedly, "Go away, Meg. You're disfigured enough without my giving you another sockdolager." She stayed in the ward a long while and asked many questions. She had as much nerve as

*In the Mad-House.*

any lady I ever saw. As she and Allison were leaving the ward, Hogan said: "Allison, chain her up. She is a bad egg." The next day I learned that this refined, delicate and courageous woman had once gone to war with her husband, a German prince, who had been with General Sherman on his memorable march to the sea. She was born an American, and belonged to the Jay family, but was now the Princess Salm-Salm.

The most amusing crank (if the word amusing can be used of an insane man) in the ward was an Englishman named Alec. He was incurably insane, but a good musician and mathematician. One of his delusions was that he was the sacred camel in the London Zoo. His mortal enemy was a lunatic named Jimmy White, who thought he was a mule. Jimmy often came to me and said: "You didn't give your mule any oats this morning." He would not be satisfied until I pretended to shoe him. Alec had great resentment for Jimmy because when Alec was a camel in the London Zoo Jimmy used to prevent the ladies and the kids from giving him sweets. When Jimmy said: "I never saw the man before," Alec replied indignantly, "I'm no man. I'm a sacred camel,

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

and I won't be interfered with by an ordinary, common mule, like you."

There are divers sorts of insanity. I had an interview with a doctor, a high officer in the institution, which convinced me, perhaps without reason, that insanity was not limited to the patients and attendants. One day an insane man was struck by an attendant in the solar plexus. He threw his hands up in the air, and cried: "My God, I'm killed". I said to another man in the ward: "There's murder". He said: "How do you know?" I replied: "I have seen death a few times." In an hour, sure enough, the report came that the insane man was dead. A few days later I was talking with the doctor referred to and I said:

"I was an eye-witness of the assault on D——." And I described the affair.

"You have been reported to me repeatedly," he replied.

"By whom?" I asked, "attendants or patients?"

"By patients," he replied.

"Surely," I remarked, "you don't believe half what insane men tell you, do you? Doctor, these same patients (in reality sane stool-

pigeons) that have been reporting me, have accused you of every crime in the calendar."

"Oh, but," he said, "I am an old man and the father of a family."

"Doctor," I continued, "do you believe that a man can be a respectable physician and still be insane?"

"What do you mean?" he said.

"In California lately," I replied, "A superintendent of an insane asylum has been accused of murder, arson, rape and peculation. This man, too, was more than fifty, had a mother, a wife and children, and belonged to a profession which ought to be more sympathetic with a patient than the church with its communicants. When a man will stoop to such crimes, is it not possible that there is a form of mental disease called partial, periodical paralysis of the faculty humane, and was not Robert Louis Stevenson right when he wrote *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*?"

The doctor grabbed me by the wrist and shouted: "Don't you dare to tell anybody about this interview." I looked into his eyes and smiled, for I am positive that at that moment I looked into the eyes of a madman.

King Kelly, an attendant who had been on

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

duty in insane asylums for many years, was very energetic in trying to get information from the stool-pigeons. The patients used to pass notes around among themselves, and the attendants were always eager to get hold of those notes, expecting to find news of beats (escapes) about to be attempted. I knew that King Kelly was eager to discover "beats" and as I, not being a stool-pigeon, was in bad odor with him, I determined to give him a jar. So one day I wrote him the following note :

" Mr. Kelly ; You have been in this hospital for years. The socks and suspenders which should go to the patients are divided impartially between you and the other attendants. Of the four razors, which lately arrived for patients, two are in your trunk, one you sent to your brother in Ireland, and the fourth you keep in the ward for show, in case the doctor should be coming around."

That night when I was going to bed I slipped the note into the King's hand and whispered: " There's going to be a beat to-night." The King turned pale, and hurriedly ordered the men in the ward to bed, so that he could read the note. Before reading it he handed it to a doctor, to be sure to get the



credit of stopping the beat as soon as possible. The doctor read it and gave the King the laugh. In the morning, when the doctor made his rounds, Mr. Kelly said to him: "We have one or two funny men in the ward who, instead of robbing decent people, could have made their fortunes at Tony Pastor's." The result was that the doctor put me down for three or four new delusions. Knowing the Celtic character thoroughly I used to crack many a joke on the King. I would say to another patient, as the King passed: If it hadn't been for Kelly we should have escaped that time sure." That would make him wild. My gift of ridicule was more than once valuable to me in the mad-house.

But I must say that the King was pretty kind when a patient was ill. When I was so ill and weak that I didn't care whether I died or not, the old King used to give me extras,—milk, eggs and puddings. And in his heart the old man hated stool-pigeons, for by nature he was a dynamiter and believed in physical force and not mental treachery.

The last few months I served in the insane asylum was at Dannemora, where I was transferred from Matteawan. The conditions at

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

the two asylums are much the same. While at Dannemora I continued my efforts to be sent back to stir to finish my sentence, and used to talk to the doctors about it as often as I had an opportunity. A few months before I was released I had an interview with a Commissioner—the first one in three years, although I had repeatedly demanded to talk to one.

"How is it," I said, "that I am not sent back to stir?"

He turned to the ward doctor and asked: "What is this man's condition?"

"Imaginary wrongs," replied the doctor.

That made me angry, and I remarked, sarcastically: "It is curious that when a man tries to make a success at little things he is a dead failure."

"What do you mean?" asked the Superintendent, trying to feel me out for a new delusion.

I pointed to the doctor and said: "Only a few years ago this man was interlocutor in an amateur minstrel troupe. As a barn-stormer he was a failure. Since he has risen to the height of being a mad-house doctor he is a success."

Then I turned to the Commissioner and

said : “ Do you know what constitutes a cure in this place and in Matteawan ? ”

“ I'd like to know,” he replied.

“ Well,” I said, “ when a man stoops to carrying tales on other patients and starts in to work cleaning cuspidors, then, and not till then, he is cured. Everybody knows that, in the eyes of attendants and doctors, the worst delusions in the aslyum are wanting to go home, demanding more food, and disliking to do dirty work and bear tales.”

I don't know whether my talk with the Commissioner had any effect or not, but a little while after that, when my term expired, I was released. I had been afraid I should not be, for very often a man is kept in the asylum long after his term expires, even though he is no more insane than I was. When the stool-pigeons heard that I was to be released they thought I must have been a rat under cover, and applied every vile name to me.

I had been in hell for several years ; but even hell has its uses. When I was sent up for my third term, I thought I should not live my bit out, and that, as long as I did live, I should remain a grafter at heart. But the pipe house cured me, or helped to cure me, of

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

a vice which, if it had continued, would have made me incapable of reform, even if I had lived. I mean the opium habit. Before I went to the mad-house there had been periods when I had little opium, either because I could not obtain it, or because I was trying to knock it off. My sufferings in consequence had been violent, but the worst moral and physical torture that has ever fallen to my lot came to me after I had entered the pipe house; for I could practically get no opium. That deprivation, added to the horrors I saw every day, was enough to make any man crazy. At least, I thought so at the time. I must have had a good nervous system to have passed through it all.

Insufficient hop is almost as bad as none at all. During my first months in the mad-house, the doctor occasionally took pity on me and gave me a little of the drug, but taken in such small quantities it was worse than useless. He used to give me sedatives, however, which calmed me for a time. Occasionally, too, I would get a little hop from a trusty, who was a friend of mine, and I had smuggled in some tablets of morphine from stir; but the supply was soon exhausted, and I saw that the

only thing to do was to knock it off entirely. This I did, and made no more attempts to obtain the drug. For the last two years in the asylum I did not have a bit of it. I can not describe the agonies I went through. Every nerve and muscle in my body was in pain most of the time, my stomach was constantly deranged, my eyes and mouth exuded water, and I could not sleep. Thoughts of suicide were constant with me. Of course, I could never have given up this baleful habit through my own efforts alone. The pipe house forced me to make the attempt, and after I had held off for two years, I had enough strength to continue in the right path, although even now the longing for it returns to me. It does not seem possible that I can ever go back to it, for that terrible experience in the mad-house made an indelible impression. I shall never be able to wipe out those horrors entirely from my mind. When under the influence of opium I used frequently to imagine I smelled the fragrance of white flowers. I never smell certain sweet perfumes now without the whole horrible experience rushing before my mind. Life in a mad-house taught me a lesson I shall never forget.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### *Out of Hell.*

I LEFT Dannemora asylum for the criminal insane on a cold winter morning. I had my tickets to New York, but not a cent of money. Relatives or friends are supposed to provide that. I was happy, however, and I made a resolution, which this time I shall keep, never to go to stir or the pipe house again. I knew very well that I could never repeat such an experience without going mad in reality; or dying. The first term I spent in stir I had my books and a new life of beauty and thought to think about. Once for all I had had that experience. The thought of going through prison routine again—the damp cells, the poor food, the habits contracted, with the mad-house at the end—no, that could never be for me again. I felt this, as I heard the loons yelling good-bye to me from the windows. I looked at the gloomy building and said to myself: “I have left Hell, and I’ll shovel coal before I go back. All the ideas that brought me here I will leave behind. In

the future I will try to get all the good things out of life that I can—the really good things, a glimpse of which I got through my books. I think there is still sufficient grey matter in my brain for that.”

I took the train for New York, but stopped off at Plattsburg and Albany to deliver some messages from the poor unfortunates to their relatives. I arrived in New York at twelve o'clock at night, having had nothing to eat all day. My relatives and friends had left the station, but were waiting up for me in my brother's house. This time I went straight to them. My father had died while I was in the pipe house, and now I determined that I would be at last a kind son to the mother who had never deserted me. I think she felt that I had changed and the tears that flowed from her eyes were not all from unhappiness. She told me about my father's last illness, and how cheerful he had been. “I bought him a pair of new shoes a month before he died,” she said. “He laughed when he saw them and said: ‘What extravagance! To buy shoes for a dying man!’”

Living right among them, I met again, of course, many of my old companions in crime,

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

and found that many of them had thought I was dead. It was only the other day that I met "Al", driving a peddler's wagon. He, like me, had squared it. "I thought you died in the pipe house, Jim," he said. This has happened to me a dozen times since my return. I had spent so much time in stir that the general impression among the guns at home seemed to be that I had "gone up the escape."

As a general thing I found that guns who had squared it and become prosperous had never been very successful grafters. Some of the best box-men and burglars in the business are now bar-tenders in saloons owned by former small fry among the dips. There are waiters now in saloons and concert halls on the bowery who were far cleverer thieves than the men who employ them, and who are worth thousands. Hungry Joe is an instance. Once he was King of confidence men, and on account of his great plausibility got in on a noted person, on one occasion, for several thousand dollars. And now he will beg many a favor of men he would not look at in the old days.

A grafter is jealous, suspicious and vindictive. I had always known that, but never



realized it so keenly as I have since my return from the mad-house. Above everything else a grafter is suspicious, whether he has squared it or not—suspicious of his pals and of everybody else. When my old pals saw that I was not working with them, they wondered what my private graft was. When I told them I was on the level and was looking for a job, they either laughed or looked at me with suspicion in their eyes. They saw I was looking good (well-dressed) and they could not understand it. They put me down, some of them, as a stool-pigeon. They all feel instinctively that I am no longer with them, and most of them have given me the frosty mit. Only the bums who used to be grafters sail up to me in the Bowery. They have not got enough sense left even for suspicion. The dips who hang out in the thieves' resorts are beginning to hate me; not because I want to injure them, for I don't, but because they think I do. I told one of them, an old friend, that I was engaged in some literary work. He was angry in an instant and said: "You door mat thief. You couldn't get away with a coal-scuttle."

One day I was taking the editor of this book

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

through the Bowery, pointing out to him some of my old resorts, when I met an old pal of mine, who gave me the glad hand. We had a drink, and I, who was feeling good, started in to jolly him a little. He had told me about an old pal of ours who had just fallen for a book and was confined in a Brooklyn jail. I took out a piece of "copy" paper and took the address, intending to pay a visit to him, for everybody wants sympathy. What a look went over that grafter's face! I saw him glance quickly at the editor and then at me, and I knew then he had taken alarm, and probably thought we were Pinkerton men, or something as bad. I tried to carry it off with a laugh, for the place was full of thieves, and told him I would get him a job on a newspaper. He answered hastily that he had a good job in the pool-room and was on the level. He started in to try to square it with my companion by saying that he "adored a man who had a job." A little while afterwards he added that he hated anybody who would graft after he had got an honest job. Then, to wind up his little game of squaring himself, he ended by declaring that he had recently obtained a very good position.

That was one of the incidents that queered me with the more intelligent thieves. He spread the news, and whenever I meet one of that gang on the Bowery I get the cold shoulder, a gun is so mighty quick to grow suspicious. A grafter who follows the business for years is a study in psychology, and his two most prominent characteristics are fear and suspicion. If some stool-pigeon tips him off to the police, and he is sent to stir, he invariably suspects the wrong person. He tells his friends in stir that "Al done him," and pretty soon poor Al, who may be an honest thief, is put down as a rat. If Al goes to stir very often the result is a cutting match between the two.

There are many convicts in prison who lie awake at night concocting stories about other persons, accusing them of the vilest of actions. If the prisoner can get hold of a Sunday newspaper he invariably reads the society news very carefully. He can tell more about the Four Hundred than the swells will ever know about themselves ; and he tells very little good of them. Such stories are fabricated in prison and repeated out of it.

When I was in Auburn stir I knew a young

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

fellow named Sterling, as straight a thief as ever did time. He had the courage of a grenadier and objected to everything that was mean and petty. He therefore had many enemies in prison, and they tried to make him unpopular by accusing him of a horrible crime. The story reached my ears and I tried to put a stop to it, but I only did him the more harm. When Sterling heard the tale he knocked one of his traducers senseless with an iron bar. Tongues wagged louder than ever and one day he came to me and talked about it and I saw a wild look in his eyes. His melancholia started in about that time, and he began to suspect everybody, including me. His enemies put the keepers against him and they made his life almost unbearable. Generally the men that tip off keepers to the alleged violent character of some convict are the worst stool-pigeons in the prison. Even the Messiah could not pass through this world without arousing the venom of the crowd. How in the name of common sense, then, could Sterling, or I, or any other grafter expect otherwise than to be traduced? It was the politicians who were the cause of Christ's trials; and the politicians are the same to-day as they were

then. They have very little brains, but they have the low cunning which is the first attribute of the human brute. They pretend to be the people's advisers, but pile up big bank accounts. Even the convict scum that come from the lower wards of the city have all the requisites of the successful politician. Nor can one say that these criminals are of low birth, for they trace their ancestors back for centuries. The fact that convicts slander one another with glee and hear with joy of the misfortunes of their fellows, is a sign that they come from a very old family ; from the wretched human stock that demanded the crucifixion of Christ.

This evil trait, suspiciousness, is something I should like to eliminate from my own character. Even now I am afflicted with it. Since my release I often have the old feeling come over me that I am being watched ; and sometimes without any reason at all. Only recently I was riding on a Brooklyn car, when a man sitting opposite happened to glance at me two or three times. I gave him an irritated look. Then he stared at me, to see what was the matter, I suppose. That was too much, and I asked him, with my nerves on

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

edge, if he had ever seen me before. He said "No", with a surprised look, and I felt cheap, as I always do after such an incident. A neighbor of mine has a peculiar habit of watching me quietly whenever I visit his family. I know that he is ignorant of my past but when he stares at me, I am rattled. I begin to suspect that he is studying me, wondering who I am. The other day I said to him, irritably: "Mr. K——, you have a bad habit of watching people." He laughed carelessly and I, getting hot, said: "Mr. K—— when I visit people it is not with the intention of stealing anything." I left the house in a huff and his sister, as I afterwards found, rebuked him for his bad manners.

Indeed, I have lost many a friend by being over suspicious. I am suspicious even of my family. Sometimes when I sit quietly at home with my mother in the evening, as has grown to be a habit with me, I see her look at me. I begin immediately to think that she is wondering whether I am grafting again. It makes me very nervous, and I sometimes put on my hat and go out for a walk, just to be alone. One day, when I was in stir, my mother visited me, as she always did when they

gave her a chance. In the course of our conversation she told me that on my release I had better leave the city and go to some place where I was not known. "For," she said, "your character, my boy, is bad." I grabbed her by the arm and exclaimed: "Who is it that is circulating these d—— stories about me?" My poor mother merely meant, of course, that I was known as a thief, but I thought some of the other convicts had slandered me to her. It was absurd, of course, but the outside world cannot understand how suspicious a grafter is. I have often seen a man, who afterwards became insane, begin being queer through suspiciousness.

Well, as I have said, I found the guns suspicious of me, when I told them I had squared it, or when I refused to say anything about my doings. Of course I don't care, for I hate the Bowery now and everything in it. Whenever I went, as I did several times with my editor, to a gun joint, a feeling of disgust passed over me. I pity my old pals, but they no longer interest me. I look upon them as failures. I have seen a new light and I shall follow it. Whatever the public may think of

## *The Autobiography of a Thief.*

this book, it has already been a blessing to me. For it has been honest work that I and my friend the editor have done together, and leads me to think that there may yet be a new life for me. I feel now that I should prefer to talk and associate with the meanest working-man in this city than with the swellest thief. For a long time I have really despised myself. When old friends and relatives look at me askance I say to myself: "How can I prove to them that I am not the same as I was in the past?" No wonder the authorities thought I was mad. I have spent the best years of my life behind the prison bars. I could have made out of myself almost anything I wanted, for I had the three requisites of success: personal appearance, health and, I think, some brains. But what have I done? After ruining my life, I have not even received the proverbial mess of pottage. As I look back upon my life both introspectively and retrospectively I do not wonder that society at large despises the criminal.

I am not trying to point a moral or pose as a reformer. I cannot say that I quit the old life because of any religious feeling. I am not one of those who have reformed by finding



Jesus at the end of a gas pipe which they were about to use as a black jack on a citizen, just in order to finger his long green. I only saw by painful experience that there is nothing in a life of crime. I ran up against society, and found that I had struck something stronger and harder than a stone wall. But it was not that alone that made me reform. What was it? Was it the terrible years I spent in prison? Was it the confinement in a mad-house, where I daily saw old pals of mine become drivelling idiots? Was it my reading of the great authors, and my becoming acquainted with the beautiful thoughts of the great men of the world? Was it a combination of these things? Perhaps so, but even that does not entirely explain it, does not go deep enough. I have said that I am not religious, and I am not. And yet I have experienced something indefinable, which I suppose some people might call an awakening of the soul. What is that, after all, but the realization that your way of life is ruining you even to the very foundation of your nature?

Perhaps, after all, I am not entirely lacking in religion; for certainly the character of Christ strongly appeals to me. I don't care

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

for creeds, but the personality of the Nazarene, when stripped of the aroma of divinity, appeals to all thinking men, I care not whether they are atheists, agnostics or sceptics. Any man that has understanding reveres the life of Christ, for He practiced what He preached and died for humanity. He was a perfect specimen of manhood, and had developed to the highest degree that trait which is lacking in most all men—the faculty humane.

I believe that a time comes in the lives of many grafters when they desire to reform. Some do reform for good and all, and I shall show the world that I am one of them; but the difficulties in the way are great, and many fall again by the wayside.

They come out of prison marked men. Many observers can tell an ex-convict on sight. The lock-step is one of the causes. It gives a man a peculiar gait which he will retain all his life. The convicts march close together and cannot raise their chests. They have to keep their faccs turned towards the screw. Breathing is difficult, and most convicts suffer in consequence from catarrh, and a good many from lung trouble. Walking in lock-step is not good exercise, and makes the men

nervous. When the convict is confined in his cell he paces up and down. The short turn is bad for his stomach, and often gets on his mind. That short walk will always have control of me. I cannot sit down now to eat or write, without jumping up every five minutes in order to take that short walk. I have become so used to it that I do not want to leave the house, for I can pace up and down in my room. I can take that small stretch all day long and not be tired, but if I walk a long straight distance I get very much fatigued. When I wait for a train I always begin that short walk on the platform. I have often caught myself walking just seven feet one way, and then turning around and walking seven feet in the opposite direction. Another physical mark, caused by a criminal life rather than by a long sojourn in stir, is an expressionless cast of countenance. The old grafter never expresses any emotions. He has schooled himself until his face is a mask, which betrays nothing.

A much more serious difficulty in the way of reform is the ex-convict's health which is always bad if a long term of years has been served. Moreover, his brain has often lost its

*The Autobiography of a Thief.*

equilibrium and powers of discernment. When he gets out of prison his chance of being able to do any useful work is slight. He knows no trade, and he is not strong enough to do hard day labor. He is given only ten dollars, when he leaves stir, with which to begin life afresh. A man who has served a long term is not steady above the ears until he has been at liberty several months; and what can such a man do with ten dollars? It would be cheaper for the state in the end to give an ex-convict money enough to keep him for several months; for then a smaller percentage would return to stir. It would give the man a chance to make friends, to look for a job, and to show the world that he is in earnest.

A criminal who is trying to reform is generally a very helpless being. He was not, to begin with, the strongest man mentally, and after confinement is still less so. He is pre-occupied, suspicious and a dreamer, and when he gets a glimpse of himself in all his naked realities, is apt to become depressed and discouraged. He is easily led, and certainly no man needs a good friend as much as the ex-convict. He is distrusted by everybody, is apt to be "piped off" wherever he goes, and

finds it hard to get work which he can do. There are hundreds of men in our prisons to-day who, if they could find somebody who would trust them and take a genuine interest in them, would reform and become respectable citizens. That is where the Tammany politician, whom I have called Senator Wet Coin is a better man than the majority of reformers. When a man goes to him and says he wants to square it he takes him by the hand, trusts and helps him. Wet Coin does not hand him a soup ticket and a tract nor does he hold on tight to his own watch chain fearing for his red super, hastily bidding the ex-gun to be with Jesus.

## EDITOR'S POSTSCRIPT.

THE life of the thief is at an end; and the life of the man and good citizen has begun. For I am convinced that Jim is strictly on the level, and will remain so. The only thing yet lacking to make his reform sure is a job. I, and those of my friends who are interested, have as yet failed to find anything for him to do that is, under the circumstances, desirable. The story of my disappointments in this respect is a long one, and I shall not tell it. I have learned to think that patience is the greatest of the virtues; and of this virtue an ex-gun needs an enormous amount. If Jim and his friends prove good in this way, the job will come. But waiting is hard, for Jim is nervous, in bad health, with an old mother to look after, and with new ambitions which make keen his sense of time lost.

One word about his character: I sometimes think of my friend the ex-thief as "Light-

fingering Jim " ; and in that name there lingers a note of vague apology. As he told his story to me, I saw everywhere the mark of the natural rogue, of the man grown with a roguish boy's brain. The humor of much of his tale seemed to me strong. I was never able to look upon him as a deliberate malefactor. He constantly impressed me as gentle and imaginative, impressionable and easily influenced, but not naturally vicious or vindictive. If I am right, his reform is nothing more or less than the coming to years of sober maturity. He is now thirty-five years old, and as he himself puts it : " Some men acquire wisdom at twenty-one, others at thirty-five, and some never."

# EVERYMAN

---

THE XVth Century morality play, with reproductions of old wood cuts. \$1.00, postage paid or at your bookseller's. The first book to bear the imprint of Fox, Duffield & Company.

---

"In typography, in paper and in make-up the edition is admirable. It is a good beginning and sets a very high standard."

*The Sun, New York.*

"The best of the old moralities, easy to read and fair to look upon."

*Evening Post, New York.*

"The book is well done, and should find a place on the shelves and in the spirits of all who care for the best in life and art."

JOHN CORBIN, in

*The New York Times.*

"Everyman" in book form will be welcomed by the large number of people whose attention has been called to this ancient morality play by its admirable presentation in different cities."

*The Outlook, New York.*

"The first publication of (the new house) "Everyman," the fifteenth century morality play given in Boston this winter, is of artistic design and of handsome, agreeable type. The old woodcuts are reproduced from the first ancient edition of the play."

*Boston Journal.*

---

NEW YORK  
FOX, DUFFIELD & COMPANY,  
36 East 21st Street.





University of California  
SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY  
305 De Neve Drive - Parking Lot 17 • Box 951388  
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90095-1388

Return this material to the library from which it was borrowed.

MAY 02 2005

**UCLA YRL ILL**

ILL CS4  
**DUE: MAR 01 2006**

UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY



A 000 966 032 5

HV  
6653  
Z9H2

Univ  
S